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THE WARDS OF PLOTINUS



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THE WARDS OF PLOTINUS

BY MRS. JOHN HUNT

THREE VOLUMES —VOL. I.



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TO

THE VERY REVEREND

ARTHUR PENRHYN STANLEY, D.D.

DEAN OF WESTMINSTER

These Volumes

ARE INSCRIBED WITH MINGLED FEELINGS

OF ADMIRATION AND GRATITUDE

June 21 1856
mittimus - 30 in!

P R E F A C E .

IT had been my intention for several years to attempt a work of fiction founded on the life of Plotinus. One reason of my choice was my intense admiration, not to say love, of this philosopher who, since I first knew his history, has been pre-eminently my favourite among the truth-seekers of the old world. The times and circumstances of his life seemed to offer favourable opportunities for reviewing the relations of Christianity and philosophy in the early ages of the Church; for setting forth the respective

conditions of Pagans and Christians before Christianity was triumphant ; and also for discussing many old questions which, in new forms, are still under discussion. Plotinus was educated at Alexandria at the time when Christianity and the Neo-Platonic philosophy were each striving for the mastery, neither of them knowing how much they had in common, nor to what extent they were both seeking the same objects. He came to Rome in the time of Philip the Arabian, and had so much influence among the Romans that many wealthy citizens left him the charge of their children. It is known that he aimed at regenerating the world by establishing a new society, in which he was to put in practice the principles of Plato's "Republic," and for this

object Gallinus proposed to rebuild for him a city in Campania. Plotinus went to Rome three or four years before the celebration of the millennium, so it may be safely inferred that he was a witness of the Roman rejoicings on that occasion. He was contemporary with Fabian, the Bishop of Rome who perished in the Decian persecution. These are clear historic outlines, but there is here such a blank in the history of Roman Christianity that a wide field is left for imagination. That Plotinus may have known Fabian is possible, though the probability is not great. He does not seem ever to have mentioned the Christians in any of his writings. The name occurs in the heading of one of the chapters in the *Enneades*, but the argument shows that by Christians he

meant some sect of Gnostics. This omission is certainly remarkable, as his disciple Porphyry is known to have written many books against Christianity.

I never found time to execute my design, but having three years ago suggested it to Mrs. Hunt, she created and wrote the story which now appears. It has taken more of the form of a popular novel than I intended, and it is also more religious in tone,—that is, it has more of ordinary religious language. I have written five or six complete chapters, those which may be called the philosophical or theological, but which they are will be a pleasant exercise for the ingenuity of the reader. The subject in other forms has been essayed by other writers. In “Hypatia” for instance, where we have

Charles Kingsley at his best, and in “Callista,” where we have Dr. Newman at his worst. To the same class of fiction belong “The Last Days of Pompeii,” and “Zenobia, or Letters from Palmyra to Rome.”

I have helped in collecting passages from classical and early Christian writers which might serve as guides to Roman customs, or to the doctrines and practices of the early Christians. Horace, Juvenal, and Petronius, have been of special service in the former, while Origen, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and Minutius Felix have been mainly relied on for the latter. As the Roman Catholic religion has so evidently clothed itself with the worn-out garments of the religion of the old Roman world both as to doctrines and customs, and even as to

arguments drawn from antiquity and Catholicity, I intended at one time to cite the authorities on which the discourses are founded, but on further consideration of the nature of fiction, I have left it undone. I have allowed a passage to stand, in which the Christians cast flowers on the grave of one departed, though the first Christians were so Protestant and dissident, not to say Puritan, that one of the fathers objected to this as a Pagan custom. It is so innocent and natural that it might be called a dictate of natural religion, but the first Christians had no love for natural religion when it had taken form in a Pagan ceremony. Roman Catholicism seems to have adopted the ceremonies of the old Roman religion generally without change. True Chris-

tianity need not despise natural religion, but it will keep it under subjection to the spirit of the Scriptures and of right reason.

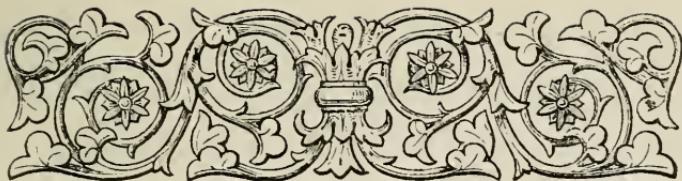
JOHN HUNT.

OTFORD VICARAGE,

May 12th, 1880.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. APPROACHING THE ETERNAL CITY	1
II. THE ORPHANS	25
III. THE PHILOSOPHER	40
IV. THE SOPHIST	55
V. ROME BY MOONLIGHT	63
VI. THE PRIEST OF JUPITER	74
VII. PLOTINUS SPEAKS	97
VIII. A REPRESENTATIVE FOR HEBE	107
IX. THE KINGDOM OF GOD	123
X. LABERIUS VISITS LAURENTUM	136
XI. THE YOUNG PATRICIAN	149
XII. THE SECULAR GAMES	170
XIII. LELA THE DANCER	194
XIV. A WORD IN SEASON	212
XV. ACATIA'S DREAM	226
XVI. PLOTINUS ON LOVE	244
XVII. COMING TO THE LIGHT	252



THE WARDS OF PLOTINUS.

CHAPTER I.

APPROACHING THE ETERNAL CITY.

“**B**EHOLD,” exclaimed the Nubian driver—“behold imperial Rome!”

He drew up his horses sharply as he spoke, and turned in his elevated seat to observe the effect of his announcement upon the two strangers with his master in the *rheda*. He remembered how his own dull imagination had been stirred by the first appearance of the Eternal City, and he showed his white teeth pleasantly, as if something had been done which greatly

gratified him. At the same time he flicked with the long thong which he held in his hand a blooming white daisy which lifted its head proudly by the road-side, apparently determined to live out to the full its little day of pride.

Iope stood upright in the *rheda*, and gazed at the scene before her with an expression of mingled curiosity and admiration. It was as if a marvellous and beautiful picture had been suddenly displayed before her eyes.

Plotinus had been lost in dreamy abstraction. Now, however, the exclamation of the Nubian thoroughly aroused him. It touched a chord which vibrated through his whole frame. He started and shook himself free from his thoughts as if they had been chains. His dark eyes, deep set under his brows, were suddenly lighted up. The colour mounted into his bronzed cheeks, and spread over his handsome though emaciated

countenance. He passed his thin long hand through the heavy black locks which crowned his noble brow, and heaved a sigh of relief, a sigh that sounded like a thanksgiving. Then he gently laid his hand upon the shoulder of his ward, and stood up beside her to have an uninterrupted view of Rome.

Those ruins which sober the thoughtful traveller of modern days were nowhere to be seen. The Latin vale was full of human life. The undulating Campagna swarmed with inhabitants. The blue Sabine mountains and the noble Alban hills enclosed a vast straggling city. But for the majestic tower-adorned walls which marked her boundaries, it would have been impossible to tell where Rome began. From them radiated long lines of flashing aqueducts, which bound, as it were with silver ribbons, innumerable villages to her girdle. The green slopes,

the flower-besprinkled valleys, were studded with majestic and elegant buildings. On every side temples, forums, villas, and richly-embellished thermæ, stately columns, theatres, and triumphal arches attracted admiration. Brilliant with gilding, chaste in sculpture, perfect in symmetry, their matchless proportions were elevated in proud majesty above the luxuriant foliage which would hereafter serve to enshroud their desolation.

“Good Paulinus,” said Iope, “where is my future home? Point it out to me.”

“Impossible,” replied the portly old Roman, smiling. “It is somewhere in yonder pink haze.”

“Shall we reach it to-night?” asked Iope, doubtfully.

“Is not Hebe weary with her journey?” replied Paulinus. “Would she not rest as soon as possible? I have ordered a chamber

to be prepared for you in my own house to-night, and Valaria, my sister, is waiting to welcome you."

"Do Quintilia and Acatia await us also?" asked Iope.

"I would they did," answered Paulinus, "but Acatia is not strong, and Quintilia ever watches over her. It is seldom that these nymphs quit their Tempe."

"I never had a sister or companion," said Iope, with an air of reflection. "I wonder how I shall like my cousins?" Then she said suddenly, "Paulinus, describe them to me."

"You set me a difficult task, innocent," replied Paulinus; "but," he added after a pause, "I think the daughters of Quintilius are not unlike the angels which the Christians represent on their tombs. I have seen among their hieroglyphics the figure of a shepherd, with a lamb on his shoulder, who has a

countenance of great nobility, with a sweet, solemn, and indescribably beautiful expression. Such a face and such an expression has Acatia, your younger cousin."

"I do not understand you, O physician," said the young Greek. "What is an angel?"

"An angel," exclaimed Plotinus, "is a messenger from heaven to earth, and a mediator between the gods and men. The angels have forms like men; but they are free from the grossness of our material bodies. They are the last of the heavenly hierarchies, the servants of mightier beings, who are filled with the fulness of Him who is before all—the nameless One. We are fallen from the divine, but the angels are guiding us in our return to the bosom of God. They speak to our souls, tell us of the joys of the spiritual life, and breathe upon us the inspiration of the celestial world." Turning to the physician, he added, "I think, Paulinus,

that instincts and strong feelings are the voices of angels, and therefore we should obey them. The earthquake which shook your city, before Gordianus undertook his expedition to the East, may have been the voice of an angel. and the people felt it was so, else had they not cried out, ‘It is a warning! it is a warning! Our Emperor cannot live long.’ Had Misitheus or Gordianus chosen to listen, to consider the sign, and the unexpected cry at a moment when all appeared fair on the horizon, they would have been prepared for treachery.”

“ Not improbable, O philosopher,” replied Paulinus, with a smile ; “ but as the oracles laughed the matter to scorn, what could they do but that which they did ? ”

“ You were talking to me about Acatia,” said Iope, who had listened to this digression with a pouting lip.

“ My little one, so I was,” replied Paulinus.

“Have I not satisfied your curiosity? What more shall I say about Acatia? She looks as if she could not err. She is a goddess, with a temper as sweet as her smile. We all love her, and we all regard her as something supernatural.”

“What of Quintilia?” said Iope.

“What of Quintilia?” echoed Paulinus. “Well, what of this maiden? Let me consider. She is not so ethereal as her sister, that is certain; and she has another kind of beauty, that is certain also. While Acatia is a goddess in the clouds, inviting us all to approach her, Quintilia is a goddess on the earth, with the bearing and features of a Juno, waving us to a distance. I cannot read Quintilia. She is a closed book.”

“I perceive that Acatia is your favourite,” said Iope.

“It may be,” replied Paulinus, sadly. “I feel that she is gliding away. I do not be-

lieve that the gods will permit us to look upon the face of Acatia long."

"Alas! alas!" sighed Iope.

"Happy Acatia!" murmured Plotinus.

The road now lay between two rows of sepulchres, and Iope bent eagerly forward to examine the various friezes and marbles. The magnitude and adornments of the tombs astonished her, and she asked a thousand questions about those whose memory they commemorated. Paulinus had some difficulty in satisfying her curiosity.

"Happy are those," remarked Plotinus, "who leave no memories behind them, and happier still are they who renounce the world."

"I shall be glad to have some companions," said the young Greek presently, and she leant over the *rheda* to watch the revolving wheels. "It was lonely in stately Alexandria—very lonely. Those who came to visit

us talked of things I did not understand ; of such wise things, physician, that when I listened I seemed to be hearing a strange language."

"Verily," replied Paulinus, with an amused expression on his fine countenance.

The maiden started. There was a tone in the utterance of that one word which instantly banished her interest in the wheels. She lifted a small oval face overspread by a sudden flush, and gazed at her opposite companion with a pair of indignant eyes, blue and bright as the firmament which canopied her native land.

"Do you doubt what I say, O Paulinus ?" she exclaimed, warmly. "I know you do. But," she added, smiling, "I will forgive you. You have yet to hear Plotinus talk with his friends."

This was said with an arch glance at the stately figure of her guardian, seated by her

side. Plotinus was again preoccupied with his thoughts. The conversation seemed to convey no more meaning to his ear than the musical ripple of a stream ; but the mention of his name was like a stone cast into the water. He was attracted by the unexpected sound.

“I hear thee, little one,” he said, gently resting his hand for a moment on the girl’s arm, “I hear thee.” But ere the echo of his own words had died he relapsed into his former reverie.

There was a pause. Then Iope, who had been watching her guardian during the interval, leant forward, and whispered in the ear of the physician, “He does not hear me now ; he has gone back into the land of dreams. It was not prudent to have mentioned his name, and we will not do it again. See, see how the shadow of thought darkens over his eyes. He is in a labyrinth, and

knows not which way to turn. O Paulinus, I wonder what he seeks for?"

"Perchance some of those wonderful words which make his conversation unintelligible," remarked Paulinus, smoothing the snowy beard which flowed over his broad breast.

Iope was pleased with the idea. She laughed musically, and cried, "Yes, yes, it is so. He has confounded the Alexandrians, but he will confound the Romans more. They will sit dumb and dazzled until his orations are over, and then they will draw a long breath, and ask their neighbours what has happened. O Paulinus, I hope you are not learned?"

"No," answered Paulinus, with an affectation of gravity. "The gods have only bestowed upon me an ordinary amount of intelligence, with some little knowledge of herbs. But," he added, with more seriousness, "I must not

encourage thee to laugh at the philosophers, O innocent, for they are lights in our dark path. As we grow old we find the gods are insufficient props for our age. We long for we know not what ; we drink at every fountain, and are yet athirst. I have long looked forward to the hour when I should be able to hear Plotinus, and have a draught of the joys which intoxicate the philosopher."

"Hush!" interrupted Iope, with a pretty deprecatory movement of the hand, "you are too serious. I like you best when you smile. Yet think not that I despise the wisdom of my guardian, although I cannot understand it. My head aches when I listen to his words and seek their meaning. I used to run away to water the flowers in the *atrium*, or look out of the lattice upon the busy streets when he began to discourse. There was some interest in watching the pedestrians, the merchantmen, the different vehicles, and

the people crowding to hear Ammonius, though I soon grew tired."

"Where was your distaff, pretty one?" asked Paulinus.

"It was left in Antioch," replied Iope. "When Plotinus brought me away from the city I did not choose to place my distaff with the baggage, for I hate work as much as I love play."

"What will Quintilia the industrious say when she hears that confession?" asked the physician.

"Will she lecture me on the wickedness of being idle, think you?" said Iope, with an arch smile.

"She shall not," replied Paulinus. "We will tell her that you are only destined to chase the dancing butterflies which flit over the flowers in her garden."

"I hope she will believe you, O good physician," said Iope naïvely, "for I cannot bear

control. I have always had the freedom of a wood-nymph since the days when I first stood alone. My father would have it so for my dead mother's sake. 'Child of hers,' said he, 'could do no wrong ;' and the good Suppedia, my nurse, thought the same."

"And thy guardian ?" said Paulinus,— "what said he to this indulgence ?"

"What said he ?" echoed Iope, opening her blue eyes wide with astonishment at the question. "What should he say ? He left me to follow my will as my father and Suppedia did."

"They were all wise," remarked Paulinus, smoothing his beard once more.

"You are laughing at me again," exclaimed Iope. "My father, at least, was right."

"It is proper that you should think so, little one," replied the physician.

"Did you know my father, O physician ?" asked the girl suddenly.

"Yes, I knew him," answered Paulinus gravely. "He was a noble Greek—brave as the son of Telamon. I knew him well; I was in the house of thy uncle, Quintilius, when he came thither and saw thy stately mother, Julia Quintilia, for the first time. He was worthy of a Roman lady, and I said so when they led her forth in the yellow veil. The shadow of the day when Licinius crossed the Styx lies very dark over the past, for he was well beloved."

The tears started into the eyes of the Greek maiden.

"O my father!" she murmured, "would that thou hadst lived! I shall never forget the day—that dreadful day—when Nauplius the eunuch came to our house and told me that I was an orphan—that my father had fallen, with many noble Romans, while scaling the walls of Antioch. Antioch was recovered from the Persians, but what cared

I? The rejoicings tortured mine ears. I lay in the arms of Suppedia and wept till I was almost blind. Then I slumbered, and in my sleep they carried me from my quiet home in the forest to my uncle Quintilius in the Roman camp, according to my father's instructions."

"He also had a noble spirit," said Paulinus. "There was not a more virtuous patrician in Rome than Quintilius, thy mother's brother. Maximus and Condianus, whose bodies were animated by one pure soul, existed again in him. Alas that one so favoured of the gods should have been doomed to an ignominious death!"

"I would I had known more of him," sighed Iope, "for when he kissed me I was consoled. 'Child,' said he, 'weep not, for thou shalt find a second father in thy mother's brother, and sisters in my daughters, who are motherless like thyself.' Then,

loaded with gifts, he sent me to Antioch, to abide his coming. But I expected him in vain. Day by day I watched from the lattice for his approach, for I longed to be gone unto Rome as he had promised. But he came not. From time to time he sent unto me messengers and epistles saying he was coming quickly, but ides succeeded ides, and yet he appeared not. He was detained at his post. At length came terrible news. Misitheus, the good and wise prefect, was dead, and there were rumours of conspiracies. You know the rest: cruel Philip triumphed, good Gordianus was slain, and with him my uncle."

Iope was weeping violently before she finished her story. Paulinus, though already acquainted with the particulars she related, would not interrupt the recital. He guessed rightly that her weeping would prove nothing more serious than a summer shower. It

ended, however, with an hysterical sob, which startled the absorbed Plotinus. He inquired the cause of her distress.

“Sentiment!” replied Paulinus, with a comical accent, designed to draw a smile from the tearful maiden. “Mnemosyne has been demonstrating to me the fact that Hebe can weep as well as laugh, and by the gods I know not which mood best becomes her beauty.”

As he approached nearer to Rome the heart of Plotinus beat faster and faster. A divine enthusiasm raised him above all sub-lunary things. Stretching forth his hands towards the heavens, he made a vow, with solemn earnestness dedicating himself to the destruction of evil in the great city. He is convinced that God has called him to preach righteousness in the high places of Rome. He is sanguine of success. The future lies unveiled before his imagination.

He sees the seed he is about to sow rapidly rising to maturity. He sees men buried in sensuality beginning to realize the divine within them, that divine of which they are a part. The cloud which overshadows men's souls, and keeps them from God, will quickly vanish. "Awake! arise! come forth, O divine in man!" he exclaimed. "Come, O eternal Spirit! breathe upon these dead souls. Quicken them, that they may live."

"You have lost none of your old enthusiasm, I perceive," remarked Paulinus. "You still dream of making men different from what they are. If you followed my profession you would be cured of dreaming. What can we do with men but leave them as they are? If they are vicious, let them rot. This is what they deserve. The effects are natural, and flow evidently from the causes. What are we made of but flesh and blood?"

and what other cures have we for boils and blisters but the ointments of the apothecary? Vice, as you call it, may be folly, but it is only natural. What other life do you expect men to follow but that which is dictated by nature?"

"Nature!" said Plotinus, with a sigh,— "much-abused word! Men call that natural which is as it is. But the vicious state is unnatural. It is not the order which the Spirit of nature dictates and strives to fulfil in all her kingdoms. Men are fighting with nature, and physicians call their state natural!"

The *rheda* rapidly approached Rome. Its bronze wheels and the hoofs of the horses were no longer heard making solitary sounds on the pavement of the Appian Way. Vehicles of various descriptions, and pedestrians of all grades, now crowded the thoroughfare and momentarily increased in

number. Iope was confused with the innumerable and strange noises which smote her ear. She hid herself behind the silken curtains of the *rhedā*, and gazed half frightened at the moving multitudes and their occupations.

Meanwhile Plotinus resumed his reverie, and Paulinus, finding the increasing commotion unfavourable to talk, looked out for acquaintances and exchanged salutations.

So the Porta Capena was reached,—that arch of arches through which emperors and victorious generals oft have passed. I turn from the bright picture which quick fancy paints,—the long procession, the imperial state, the eagle lifted high, the purple robe, the crowned head, to think of one who entered Rome by the same gate two hundred years before, and in imagination I gaze on a small, unpretentious company. A little band

of soldiers circles round one humble prisoner. The appearance of the prisoner is “mean.” His coarse garment covers a contemptible figure ; but the stern countenance casts an awe over his companions, and no nobler hero, no more reverend head, hath ever been overshadowed by thy bow, Capena ! It is Paul—Paul, the ardent apostle of the Gentiles, who emerges from the gloom, who goes into Rome to obtain a diadem more precious than that which awaits an earthly conqueror.

The sun shone forth with remarkable brightness as the *rheda* emerged from the shadow of the Porta Capena, and a smile passed over the thoughtful countenance of Plotinus.

“Behold a good omen !” he exclaimed. “In the smile of the sun I recognise a reflection of the smile of my God ; and that He should smile when I enter Rome is to me

an indication that He will be auspicious to my endeavours to lead Rome towards Him. And perhaps—perhaps," he added, "He may yet further reveal Himself in me."



CHAPTER II.

THE ORPHANS.

BEWEEN quiet Laurentium and the sea stood the villa of Quintilius, the home of the Roman orphans who had been left under the guardianship of Plotinus.

It was a beautiful spot, encircled by woods full of natural openings, which afforded magnificent glimpses of the sea and the mountains. The sun seemed to linger fondly amid its luxuriant vegetation. There in the dullest seasons of the year it would throw its golden gleam over the flowers, and light up the shadows which gathered in the garden, or stretched their length upon

the terraces. A cool, soft breeze perpetually stole in and out among the gnarled trunks of the old trees, as if a lost wood-nymph were fanning the atmosphere and filling it with fragrance, while from every sheltered nook poured forth a flood of melody,—the song of birds, the hum of insects, or the sweet murmuring sound of water.

“Surely the gods dwell here!” exclaimed the delighted Iope as Paulinus led her thither for the first time.

“Where could they find a better Elysium?” replied the wearied physician, as he welcomed the change of atmosphere with many a thanksgiving.

His voice startled an aged woman who was feeding her poultry in the entrance court behind a screen of laurels; and all the yellow grain garnered in her veil was suddenly scattered among the birds which fluttered around her.

Iope clapped her hands gleefully. It was a sight to see the peacocks with their wide expanded tails, the red-feathered flamingoes, the Rodian hens with their young broods, struggling for a share of the spoil.

“*Salve, good mother!*” said Paulinus, in answer to the woman’s ejaculation of alarm. “I trust your charges thrive as well as these plump beauties.”

“Do you know no better than to frighten the aged, O Paulinus?” replied the matron, crossly.

“By silence, O illustrious! you trod like a panther I once saw in the arena.”

“Did I?” replied the physician, with a smile. “One of my weight is not wont to tread so softly. I fear you grow deaf, O nurse.”

“Not I,” answered the nurse, testily. “That infirmity was never one of the complaints of my ancestors. Those birds make so much noise when they are fed, a whole

legion of soldiers might march into the gardens unheard."

Paulinus laughed. "If some of our invincibles knew that," said he, "I bet thee ten sesterces, O mother, they would seek a sight of thy treasures. How is Acatia?"

"Daily more drooping," replied the nurse mournfully.

"It is a strange disease," remarked the physician.

"'Tis stranger that she suffers it so cheerfully," said the old nurse. "Ye gods, I would prefer a sudden departure from life to a melting away out of existence like Acatia's. She protests she feels little more than weakness, and is as patient as a lamb under preparation for sacrifice; but 'tis mournful to see her fading, fading, fading, without the power to help. And she is so sweetly amiable, so thoughtful for others," added the woman, wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Every day she seems to draw nearer to our hearts, making it more difficult for us to be resigned to her departure. Would—would that those things which the wise men tell us of another world were true ! and then we should have some comfort when we closed her eyes."

"No man can positively assert they are not true, O mother," replied the physician.

"And who shall declare that they are certainly veritable ?" retorted the nurse.

"The idea of another world, free from the imperfections of this, is a pretty fantasy," said Paulinus, speaking rather to himself than to the woman. "But what good is it if, as Plotinus seems to think, our present individuality shall be absorbed in the One ?"

"For myself, I do not trouble about an after life at all," said the old nurse, shortly. "There may be one or there may not ; I shall live as long and as pleasantly as I can,

just as these pretty fowls do, and not trouble myself with preparations for an uncertainty. I am only an ignorant old woman, but I think this resolution a proof that I am wiser than many a philosopher. What do the philosophers but dream? And what would they teach others to do but dream? How would the world go round if all of us became dreamers? Give me no wisdom, O Minerva! for he that is over-wise is on the verge of being a fool."

"I perceive you are a philosopher, O my good friend," said Paulinus, smoothing his long white beard to conceal his amusement.

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Am I?" said she. "Then it is a pity there are not more philosophers of the same kind." And she turned to conduct Paulinus and his young companion into the fruit-garden, which was the favourite resort of the sisters at that hour of the day.

“We will go alone,” said Paulinus ; “we will surprise the nymphs in their retreat.”

But Iope pleaded to stay longer with the birds.

“I will follow thee shortly,” said she ; “and meanwhile do thou go and announce my coming to my cousins. How strange it will be to have companions ! I tremble lest I should not please them.”

It was early summer, and the orchard was white with blossoms—pink-edged blossoms, which sheltered their graceful forms amid the half-matured leaves, and shed their petals at every touch of the soft breeze, for the fruit was already formed.

“Those flowers tempt me,” said the physician. “I must possess myself of some of them ; yea, though autumn be the poorer by a couple of choice Falarian pears.”

He put aside the low spreading branches of an intertwining walnut, and stretched

forth his hand to grasp the blossoms which he coveted. But ere the flowers were gathered a vision dazzled the physician's eyes. A tall and stately maiden suddenly appeared under the arched boughs. A screen of leaves—a passage of foliage connecting the flower-gardens with the orchard—had concealed her form until she advanced immediately in front of the spot where the physician had paused. Simultaneously they uttered an exclamation of pleasure and surprise, and the next instant the hands of the maiden were grasped in those of Paulinus with a warmth which bespoke the affection which each bore towards the other.

“ My child—Quintilia ! ” said the physician, with a parental embrace. “ How well you look ! how beautiful ! at least your appearance doth credit to the pure air of this lovely neighbourhood.”

Quintilia smiled,—a rare smile, a smile

reserved for her especial friends, a smile which transformed her from a beautiful “unapproachable goddess upon earth” into an innocent and confiding maiden.

Quintilia had a strangely quiet countenance. She was possessed of a wonderful calmness, which cast a spell over all who came into her presence. They called her cold and emotionless; but she had more warmth, more real sympathy than her judges. Once aroused, those pale classic features, still and cold and chiselled as they *appeared* to be, could be animated with a vitality almost mysterious. With delicate blue veins, swelling into sight across the broad white forehead, with dark arched eyebrows slightly elevated, with faintly flushed cheeks, with eyes full of expression, glowing with a brilliance which darkened their hues,—with lips mobile, and bosom heaving from the emotion which had been awakened

in one whose thoughts seldom expressed themselves on the surface, the presence of Quintilia commanded reverence and awe.

“ What an Elysium is this place ! ” exclaimed Paulinus ; “ so many shadows, such a refreshing coolness after the burning heat of Rome. The city hath been like a baker’s oven these three days past. The heat of summer is premature ; every face rivals the shelled walnut in its tints, and the strongest artificer lolls about like a fine lady in a *lectica*. The very slaves drop asleep under the lash, so drowsy is the atmosphere. We may expect a fierce meeting between the thunder-clouds before long. I am glad of this breath of air, beautiful Quintilia,—Rome stifled me. Even had the journey not been necessary I would have come, for lassitude overcame me ; I crawled from the house of one patient unto the house of

another. The gods send more air in Rome before I return !

“ But think not,” added the complimentary old physician, gazing at Quintilia with an expression of admiration under his shaggy brows, “ that I should consider the pleasure of a visit to the villa of Quintilius perfect without a sight of the nymphs who abide within its precincts. Where hides thy sister ? Does she conceal herself from the face of man lest her beauty should inflict a cruel wound ? ”

“ She hides herself from the face of the sun,” answered Quintilia. “ That other face doth not often show itself in this retreat. Indeed, I do not remember to have seen any other face but thine and that of our brother Laberius here since the death of our father.”

“ Is it possible ? ” exclaimed Paulinus. “ Whence then will arise your prospects of

marriage? Let me consider. O Quintilia, twenty summers have passed since you were born. Twenty summers! and they have gone by like a blast of wind. It is time you thought seriously of the yellow veil; I will tell the young patricians what a jewel is to be found hidden in the villa of Quintilius."

Quintilia shook her head. "The jewel," said she, "is so fast attached to the place, that the seekers would strive in vain to remove it."

"Say you so? and mean you so?"

"I mean it," said the maiden seriously. "Thou knowest that I have my duties, O Paulinus: while my sister lives I live for her alone; I think not of nuptials."

"It would have been otherwise if you had been a vestal," said Paulinus, desiring to tease her. "Then your head would have been full enough of marriage, and you would

have longed for the time of service to expire."

Quintilia answered not. She moved majestically forward, and turned an angle in the leafy boundary of the orchard. Paulinus followed, and the next moment he saw Acatia.

The maiden sat, or rather reclined, under a great fig tree close by an old wall, rich in the growth peculiar to such places, and half concealed by a spreading vine.

Paulinus laid his hand suddenly on the arm of Quintilia. "She has not seen us," he whispered. "Let us observe her for a moment."

How shall I describe Acatia spiritualized by the fatal disease which has doomed her to an early death? She is like, and yet unlike Quintilia. The contour of her countenance is less oval, but more beautiful; the features are less perfect, but of a sweeter

refinedness. We must take a white lily for the symbol of Acatia—so slender, so delicate, so pure, so white is the maiden. The petals are not more snowy or transparent than her complexion, and the golden colour of the stamens shines in her hair. Her figure, tall and lithe, and graceful as the stem, seems bowed by every breath, and ready to be broken. But no cruel breath disturbs her to-day. She is stronger than usual. A flush tinges her white cheek, and her soft eyes are not so strangely brilliant. The dreamy look, however, is still there. When her attention is distracted from the roll of papyrus which she is reading, she gazes forward into space. She appears to be contemplating objects veiled from us; she sees beyond the light floating clouds and the sun something which fascinates her gaze, and makes her long for the wings of a dove.

For some moments Paulinus continued to gaze at Acatia. He marked changes in the fair young face which had not been observed by those who were constantly by her side. He thought he could almost number the hours she had to live, and a sad, serious expression stole over the countenance which was usually so full of merriment. Quintilia saw it. She surmised what was passing through the physician's mind, and her heart stood still. She was about to draw him aside to ask him questions which she feared to ask, when Iope suddenly appeared upon the scene.



CHAPTER III.

THE PHILOSOPHER.

PLOTINUS had come from Alexandria. The great city of Alexander was the scene of the last developments of the philosophies of the old world. The civilization and learning of ancient Egypt had been interpenetrated by rays of light from other lands. In the process of the divine education of the human race, the representatives of all nations were brought together. Every one had something to teach but more to learn. The souls of men were yearning for truth. They were seeking after God, if haply they might find

Him ; and God, who thus stirred men's souls, intended to satisfy them. It was the preparation for seed-time. New life was everywhere pressing into the world, and men knew not the end of the preparations which they were the instruments of making. Alexandria was the meeting-place of the new and the old world. Here, in reality, began that conflict between Christianity and paganism of which the whole Roman Empire became the arena.. Conflict I have called it, and so it was in a most true and proper sense, and yet in another aspect it was but the necessary process of the passing away of an old order which had done its proper work, and the introduction of another whose work was now begun.

The contrast between pagan philosophy and Christianity is undoubtedly great, but there are aspects in which they may be viewed as different forms of the same ideas,

as means which contemplate the same object. The great principles of natural religion are the same in both. We have come to speak of Christianity as revelation, and pagan wisdom as philosophy ; but the Christian teachers of the first centuries claimed the title of philosophers, finding in Christianity the true wisdom. It is now the hardest of problems to trace the progress of Christian ideas among the civilized nations of the old world. Sometimes they came into collision with the ideas that were currently received, but at other times the Christian teachers recognised in the doctrines of the old philosophers the counterpart of their own. When the Jews went beyond the boundaries of Palestine, and saw what lessons the pagans had learned, they discovered that the true God was not the teacher of the chosen people only, but in some way, and in various degrees, He had

been teaching all men. The speculations of Socrates and Plato were allied to the doctrines of Moses and the prophets. The teaching of Christ was the perfection of both, and Christians naturally saw in the doctrines both of Jews and pagans the rudiments of that faith which was to regenerate the world. They had all spoken of the One who was without body, and who had neither parts nor passions. They had all spoken of the Word by whom the worlds were made, and who was the medium of intercourse between God and man, the Son of God, in a sense God, and yet the firstborn of all creation. They had all spoken of the inspiration of man by the Divine, and the necessity of governing, if not mortifying the earthly affections, that man may return to the bosom of God.

The pagan disciples of Plato in Alexan-

dria were not far from the kingdom of God. The founder of the school, Ammonius Saccas, is believed to have been a Christian, but to have renounced the external profession of Christianity and the apostolic interpretation of the person and office of Christ. He recognised in Jesus a great teacher, one sent from God, but not the visible image of the Invisible, not the Word made flesh. Ammonius was originally a porter, and carried baggage in the streets of Alexandria. Hence the name Saccas, which means a porter. He became a teacher, and lectured on the science of knowing and being. It was only in such an age of mental excitement as then existed in Alexandria that such a phenomenon was possible. When the heart is open to every impression, and the mind eager to follow every inquiry, knowledge spreads among all classes, and the rich and

poor often sit as eager learners at the feet of men whose genius or originality has raised them above the condition in which they were born. So it was with Ammonius. Vast multitudes attended his lectures. Young and old, rich and poor, were charmed by his eloquence. He believed with all his heart, and his burning words kindled an enthusiasm which carried conviction to the minds of all who heard him. Was not man made in the divine image? Did not God dwell in men's hearts? Was He not drawing us to Himself, and bidding us more and more to leave the temporal and the transient, that we might seek the eternal, that which was, and is, and abideth ever? In the busy streets of Alexandria God was present. Men might be immersed in business or in pleasure. They might be forgetful of the divine within them, but God was not forgetful of them. HE THAT IS went

forth with renewing power throughout the world, and the divine Word was uttering speech and showing forth knowledge in the reason of all men. There was Reason speaking to reason as deep calleth unto deep, and an answer to the Reason which called would certainly come from the other reason which had become temporarily bewildered through the domination of sense.

One day among the hearers of Ammonius was a pale Egyptian youth. His name was Plotinus. He had come to Alexandria from his native Lycopolis, where from his earliest years he had pondered over the problem of being. What am I? whence am I? and whither am I going? were questions which he had asked with an earnestness that bowed down his soul, and made him look older than he was, before he had seen many summers. He plunged eagerly into the burning questions that engaged the minds of the Alex-

andrians. He frequented the schools of the philosophers, and listened to every sage who promised to solve the mystery of being. He unfolded all the rolls of papyrus in the great library, and inquired diligently of the ancients. He asked Nature in all her moods what she could tell him of her origin, her destiny, or the object of her existence. In the desert and in the streets of the city, in solitary places and among the busy haunts of men, by day and by night, in his chamber and on his bed, he was ever pondering over the great mystery. At last he was about to give it up in despair. The Sceptics, he said, are right after all. Man cannot get beyond his dark cage. Our minds are bounded by limits that forbid us searching into the infinite. We know nothing. We sleep. We are in a dream. Existence is an illusion. Phantoms mock our reason. All is uncertain ; even that which seems most real is unstable

as the waves of the ocean or the flitting sands of the desert. Alas ! he continued, what shall I do ? I have senses which might give me pleasure, but I have kept them under control. I have believed in an eternal good, though I could not find it, and now it is nowhere to be found. Why should a man torment himself about the impossible ? Why deny himself when there is no profit in the denial ? Who can tell whether or not there are gods ? Who can say if there is a life beyond life ? The generations of men have passed away as the generations of leaves. All life is transient. It is succeeded by death and oblivion. As the rush of waters in the stream, as the meteors in the heavens, as the span of an insect life, so are the lives of men. To-day they are, to-morrow they are extinguished. Consciousness vanishes, and no conscious mind knows them any more for ever.

To this state of mind Plotinus had come.

Trembling on the verge of despair, he left his lodging one morning to perform his devotions at the Temple of Osiris, where he had been used to worship. That morning he prolonged his walk, and returned by the Cœnobic or Eastern gate. Before reaching the Temple of Osiris he came to that dedicated to the memory of Alexander. Worship an unseen God ! Plotinus said to himself. Why should I worship the gods at all ? They care nothing for me. They will not listen to my prayers. I only perform vain ceremonies. Let me go rather to the Temple of Alexander and here let me worship, not the invisible and perhaps only imaginary gods, but the heroes of humanity, the men who have conquered tyrants, subdued savages, built cities, promoted arts and industry—these are the proper objects of worship. Let me fall reverently before the shrine of the mighty conqueror, the great Alexander.

He was about to enter the temple, when suddenly there appeared a company of men making for a house in the square of Democrates. One of them was robed in the garb of a philosopher. He walked before in silence, absorbed in thought, while those who followed him were busy in discussion.

“What is it?” said Plotinus. “Who are these?”

The words were addressed to an Alexandrian who had paused to see the company pass.

“Only Ammonius, the porter,” was the answer.

“In the garb of a philosopher!” said Plotinus.

“Yes,” said the Alexandrian, “he professes to teach the philosophy of Plato, and these fools follow him. How much better would it be for him to carry bags at the harbour, where he could make honest money! But no man

knows his place here. We are all philosophers, and this Ammonius discourses of entelechies and potentialities, of causalities and actualities, of essences and qualities, substrata and superficies, of the One and the all, the specials, the generals, the existent and the non-existent, and a thousand profundities which no fool but himself and his disciples would think it possible to understand.—Avaunt, philosopher, and thy whole tribe!" shouted the Alexandrian, with a contemptuous laugh, as the company passed him.

Plotinus was much of the same opinion as the Sceptic who had just spoken. But curiosity was not dead. There was still a ray of hope. He followed the company, and entered with them the room in which the philosopher was to lecture.

Ammonius began his discourse. His subject was the inspiration of the Almighty, which gives man understanding. Reason,

he said, was the gift of God. It was the light which God had kindled in the soul of man. To this reason God spoke, and in the divine light it saw light. The reason of God is manifested in man. It overflows the bounds of matter. It recognises the real, and takes knowledge of that which is. There are principles which the common understanding of man must admit to be settled, certain, and immutable. We all appeal to a standard, and the criterion of that standard is the common reason which is possessed by all rational beings. Those who see not this standard are deficient in the development of reason. They are not properly men, but the waifs and strays of humanity.

The whole being of Plotinus was wrapped in attention. His gaze was steadfastly fixed upon the face of Ammonius, and his countenance was lighted up with an unearthly effulgence. The philosopher had barely

finished the first part of his lecture, when Plotinus exclaimed audibly, "This is the man I am seeking."

Henceforth Ammonius was his master. For eleven years he sat at his feet learning wisdom, until the disciple became as famous as the master. To prosecute his inquiries into the philosophies of the East, he joined the fatal expedition of Gordianus against the Persians. It was then that he became acquainted with the noble Quintilius, who, when he was condemned to death by Philip the Arabian, committed his three motherless children and his orphan niece to the care of the philosopher. Laberius, Quintilia, and Acatia were then residing in Rome, and Iope was living with her old nurse at Antioch, to which city Plotinus fled when he found his own life in danger. On leaving Antioch Plotinus went to Alexandria, taking Iope with him. His intention was to proceed from thence

to Rome on a visit to his other wards, with whom he proposed to place the young Greek, but circumstances frustrated his design, and he was compelled to remain in Alexandria, and delegate the guardianship of the children of Quintilia to his friend Paulinus, an eminent Roman physician. In consequence of a letter from Paulinus, informing him of the reckless life led by his ward Laberius and the majority of the Roman youth, the philosopher had at last severed the ties which bound him to the great city of the East.



CHAPTER IV.

THE SOPHIST.

N the Latin Road, hard by the tomb of Paris the mime, stood the mansion of Claudius Bromius. He was at this time about forty years of age, in the zenith of his physical strength and living according to the principles of a philosophy which some called Sceptical, others Epicurean, but which the multitude described under the general name of that of the Sophists. Bromius had been educated at Athens, and added Greek elegance to Roman sensuality. His house was the resort of all the men of fashion in Rome.

At his banquets there were never less than seven courses, and the delicacies vied with those of Apicius. His table was attended by dark Moors, Bulgarian slaves carried his sedan, and his chariot was known in the Flaminian Road by the rapidity with which he drove. He had found, he said, the only truth that man can really know, which is to live while we live, and make the most of life by obtaining the greatest amount of pleasure.

The vast multitude of men follow the life of pleasure from mere frivolity or thoughtlessness. It is easy, it has many inducements, and the end of it is not discerned. But Bromius had made his choice with deliberation. He had studied philosophy with some earnestness, and the conclusion at which he had arrived was that the life of pleasure is the vocation and chief end of man. He did not deny the existence

of gods or spirits. They might, he said, exist, but we knew nothing about them, and had no means of knowing. We could never get beyond the sensuous. It was the only avenue by which man could know anything, and the sole medium of all his pleasures. Nature is our true teacher, and if there be a God at all, she is the voice of God. Let us obey her dictates. Every creature has its instincts, and by following these it fulfils the law of its being. Man's destiny is that of the highest animal. His more delicately formed brain enables him to add to his enjoyments—to find more agreeable methods of satisfying his instincts. The painter and the sculptor bring before us forms of beauty which gratify the eye ; the musician produces sounds which are agreeable to the ear ; and the imagination revels in the memory of past enjoyments, or in the prospect of future pleasures. In

every case it is the sense which is the medium and the measure of our pleasure. The great ambition of man, therefore, should be to increase the number of the agreeable sensations.

The philosophy of Bromius had many attractions, and especially for youth. A clear head could justify to itself the utmost gratification of the sensual instincts. The mystery of life was solved so far as it was capable of solution. This was all that concerned man and his duty. Had there been anything more important, the gods would have revealed it.

The house of Bromius was ever open, not only to his friends, and to those who came to learn and see the true principles of human life in their full and perfect operation, but also to all inquirers, or to any who wished to controvert the principles of the Sophists. Bromius had given great

attention to the study of rhetoric. He could speak with marvellous facility ; and, apparently unknown to himself, he had acquired the art of giving a specious appearance to fallacious arguments ; and when answering objections he could dexterously omit the strong points that were urged against him. This use of rhetoric and this exercise of dialectic flowed naturally from the philosophy he had embraced. If truth absolute is eternally hidden from man, if by no exercise of ingenuity or industry he can ever get beyond phenomena ; and if the highest aim of human life is the pursuit of agreeable sensations, of what other use are the intellectual faculties but to be exercised in subtleties and sophistries that may add to our pleasure or amusement ?

The great theme of Bromius was the philosophy of sensuous pleasures. When he had well drunk of the hilarious Faler-

nian, he would overwhelm his guests with a torrent of eloquence in praise of Nature for having bestowed such bounties on man. "Here," he would say, "is Nature's provision for the simple wants she creates. Her voice is the voice of the only god that man can know. She calls to pleasure, and gives the means of obeying the call. By the influence of the spring showers and the summer's heat the vine grows, and when autumn comes the fruit ripens in the genial sunshine. Man, by his ingenuity, ferments the grapes and treads them in the vat. His experience teaches him that the longer the wine is preserved, the more luscious it becomes. He is improving Nature's lessons, not violating her laws, going deeper into her mysteries, grasping the pleasures which, though pretending to deny, she still intends that she will give. O joyful mother of us all! how have we abused thee,

misunderstood thee, dashed from our lips
the joys thou didst offer, and under the
pretence of virtue, morality, or some other
name invented by a vain and incomprehen-
sible philosophy, denied ourselves the plea-
sures prepared for us ! Men talk of pain
and hardship and self-denial having bene-
ficial ends, but man's destiny, as written in
the very framework of nature's laws, is to
avoid pain and seek pleasure. Fill high the
bowl and drink deep. Wreathe roses round
the brow. Crown the head with myrtle.
Repose on the soft couch. Feast the eyes
with all forms of beauty, above all with thy
beauty, O goddess woman, made for man !
Listen to the sweetest sounds, and inhale
the odours that perfume the air. Life is
brief, let us make the most of it. Let us eat
and drink and rejoice while we may. To-
morrow we are gone, sunk into oblivion that
never ends ; our life returns to the sum of

the all-life, to come forth again in new forms—joyful Nature exulting in her everlasting renewal."

Then would follow shouts of applause and approbation from the band of youths who had imbibed the principles of Bromius as deeply as they had imbibed his wine. His doctrine was too evident to be refuted. It needed no demonstration. Did they not all feel as well as see to what rapturous pleasures man was called? Would Nature deceive us? they cried. We cannot believe it. Her final goal in all her works is the happiness of her creatures, how she may give the greatest pleasure to the greatest number.



CHAPTER V.

ROME BY MOONLIGHT.

BROMIUS and his disciples had ceased as philosophers to believe in the existence of gods ; but as fashionable Romans they worshipped them with the minutest attention to ritual and ceremony. A religion of some kind was necessary in the life of a Roman, and why not that which had been inherited from his forefathers ? The festivals of the gods furnished continual opportunities for rejoicing. Their worship made life pleasant, and their lives, as told in the popular traditions, were the embodiments of the sensual

philosophy. They were all hilarious and jolly gods, personifications of Nature in her merriest moods, patterns of what man should be. What marvel if the priests believed not? The age of simple faith was past. And what marvel if the youths of Rome, devoted to pleasure, chose for their life-vocation the office of the priest? Laberius, the son of Quintilius, had been admitted one of the priests of Jupiter Capitolinus. His mode of life was nearly that described by Seneca, when he says of some that they inverted the order of nature—slept in the day and rioted in the night; or, in the words of another philosopher, they never saw either the rising or the setting sun.

On the night when Plotinus and Iope, the guests of Paulinus, were refreshing themselves after their journey, Laberius was walking on the Quirinal in the street of the Cornelii.

The prospect of his guardian's residing in Rome disturbed his mind. He vaguely anticipated that the philosopher's arguments against the life he was leading would not be so easily parried as those of Paulinus. Instinctively he felt that his conduct was wrong, but he refused to hear the voice of reason ; for, though a disciple of the Sophists, he had not learned to justify his mode of life by special pleadings at the bar of conscience. He was naturally thoughtful, and serious reflections often intruded themselves even in the midst of his pleasures, but he tried to expel them by continual excitement. Anticipation of Plotinus's disapproval had raised the ghost of his past acts. All their folly was revealed, and he shrank from the sight. He loathed it, he repented, and yet he had not courage enough to vow that he would do otherwise. While Lethe

was to be found in the haunts of pleasure he would wait upon pleasure.

So he hurried recklessly in the direction of a house where the wildest company were always to be found.

The moon was seated high in the heavens on a silver-edged throne of ebony cloud. She shone full and bright on the fair panorama of Rōme. Every object was distinctly visible, half clothed or bathed at the base in a sea of deep shadow. There was not an outline, not a prominence in palace, or arch, or column untouched by the soft, tender light. The sides of the mountains were white, and the valleys were filled with sheen, while the narrow breasts of the aqueducts and the broad bosom of the Tiber gleamed like the lances of the Sabines, whence the Quirinal derived its name.

Who would have thought that vice lay concealed in such a fairy-like scene—that

riot and drunkenness were wont to break the mysterious stillness into which the vast, intensely blue firmament, the bright incomprehensible stars, the black still trees, the strange quiet light of the moon awed the earth?

Suddenly there was a confused sound of shouting, and in a moment Laberius was surrounded by a portion of the company whom he sought. The heat of the apartment where they had been carousing had driven them into the gardens, and from thence into the street. Fired with wine, and possessed with a spirit of adventure, they now sought the lowest parts of Rome, and it took little persuasion to turn the steps of the young priest in the same direction.

Laughing uproariously, talking loudly and freely, the wild garlanded throng moved towards the Suburra. This was a quarter of the city inhabited by thieves,

hawkers, and coffin-makers. It was at all times a crowded, noisy, and filthy neighbourhood—the centre of every vice which tended to corrupt mankind. The streets were narrow, and the protruding shops made them almost impassable. The progress of the vehicle and the pedestrian was continually interrupted, and innumerable disputes and quarrels arose in consequence. The clamour, indeed, seemed to be perpetual. But, bad as it was by the light of the sun, it was worse by night, for the decrease of the rumbling, thunder-like sound of wheels made more audible the horrible oaths and shouts of the reeling multitude.

Few of the respectable citizens ventured into this dangerous thoroughfare after sunset, and, consequently, it presented great attractions to the wild company which surrounded Laberius. Attended by their torch-bearers, they elbowed their way

through the motley throng. Here a passage was forced through a curious crowd of people collected round an Egyptian juggler, there a group of gladiators or an importunate multitude of hucksters or beggars were persuaded with difficulty to allow the reckless young patricians to pass.

“Silurus! Silurus! Silurus!” shouted a tall Carthaginian, with lungs which sent his words thundering high above the mingled noise of the busy crowd.

“Stinking Silurus!” screamed an urchin behind him.

The giant turned in a rage, and the fierce expression of his face instantly attracted attention.

“Stinking Silurus!” echoed several voices. “Who will buy stinking Silurus?”

Down came the Carthaginian’s basket from his shoulders, and he smote one of the speakers with his huge fist. The others

immediately crowded together and attacked him in return. The basket was overturned and a general fight ensued. Every available article was transformed into a weapon ; blood flowed, and the vanquished were mercilessly trodden under foot. The Carthaginian, with a disfigured face, beat a retreat, but the fight continued with those who had taken his part. A shower of potsherds from the windows exasperated the combatants to still greater violence. They soon ceased to distinguish their proper opponents, and fought every one his neighbour with a fury as unreasonable as it was dangerous.

For some time the young patricians contented themselves with the simple part of spectators ; but an excited Moor happening to smite one of them, daggers were drawn to avenge the insult, and the young nobles were instantly involved in the fray.

“Down with the patricians!” cried a voice, “down with the patricians! They oppress the poor, and rejoice in our misfortunes. They eat from platters of gold while we perish for want of bread. Down with the patricians!”

“Let us escape while there is yet time,” exclaimed Laberius, who was more sober than his companions, although he had quaffed several cups of Cæcuban.

“Escape!” echoed the Moor who had felt the point of the patrician’s dagger, “we are going to send all of you over the Styx. There, and there!” and he struck Laberius with a blow which felled him to the earth.

His friends and their attendants instantly circled round him to preserve his body from further injury; but it is probable that all their valiant efforts would have been ineffectual had not unexpected assistance arrived.

The *lectica* of a fearless patrician, returning from a banquet, was suddenly borne forward on the shoulders of several strong Liburnians ; and the guard which accompanied it began to force a passage. This, under the circumstances, was a more difficult task than usual ; and the occupant of the *lectica* soon looked out to inquire the reason of the long delay.

“ By Tarpeian Jove ! ” cried he, “ what do I see ? A priest of Jupiter bleeding on the ground, and purple hems torn in tatters ! ”

“ Claudius Bromius ! ” exclaimed the almost exhausted youths, “ the gods have sent thee to our aid.”

Bromius leaped from his *lectica* with a drawn sword, and called loudly upon his slaves and freedmen to thrust back the savage multitude, while he bent over the prostrate body of the priest.

“ Ye gods ! ” he exclaimed, recognising

the pallid countenance of the young man, "it is Laberius! Is he dead? We will have some of you before the Proconsul tomorrow for this deed."

The angry crowd shrank back abashed. The suddenness of the patrician's appearance, his known authority, his festive garments, glittering with jewels, overawed them.

Laberius was insensible, and all the efforts of Bromius and his companions could not recover him. He had a deep gash across his forehead.

"It is a case for Paulinus, the old Esculapius," said Bromius. "Place him in the litter, and let us carry him quickly to the physician's house."

And thus the face of Laberius was first presented to the contemplation of his guardian.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRIEST OF JUPITER.

OME time had passed away since Plotinus had entered Rome. In a room almost destitute of furniture, but plentifully bestrewn with rolls of papyrus, stood the philosopher. His pale, interesting countenance was turned towards the lattice, and he looked gravely upon the scenery stretched out beyond the walls of Rome.

The beauty of the Campagna was glorious in the morning sunshine. The storied plain of Latium gleamed with an emerald light. The temple on the Alban mount touched the

blue heavens with a golden roof, and the Tyrrhene sea scintillated like crystal. Brilliant new-born flowers dotted the Latin vale with all the tints of the rainbow, and the long circular ridge of mountains in the background shadowed out a boundary, gleamy, hazy, and majestic.

It was a sight which generally enchanted the eyes of the philosopher, and heightened the beauty of his countenance with that expression which made it most attractive. But to-day the scene and the sunshine failed to produce their usual effect. His eyes had a troubled look, and some inward emotion made his lips tremble. That sweet mystical reverie, wont to visit him so frequently, was absent. The beauty upon which he gazed did not to-day direct his thoughts to the contemplation of a higher beauty — a greater perfection. It seemed to have assumed the form of a pall, and he

saw beneath it the rottenness which it covered.

A wave of disappointment was sweeping over the philosopher. He had come to Rome full of great hopes, none of which had been fulfilled. It was true that he had gathered a multitude of followers, but only a few were true disciples. He could almost count these upon his fingers. Crowds flocked to his lectures, listened breathlessly to his eloquence, commended his sentiments, and went forth from his presence overflowing with good intentions. But, alas! once outside, they cast their resolutions to the winds, and plunged further into the fatal labyrinth from which he sought to extricate them. Rome was sunk deeper in the mire than he had supposed. What could a single man do against so mighty an enemy? what power had he to persuade men to resist a Circe with a lapful

of temptations? Words spoken in the ears of her victims were pearls cast before swine. Plotinus stood on the verge of despair, but hope would not die within him. It still called to him to grope along the dark road, assuring him that the light was before, and that although as yet he had seen no fruit the time of harvest would come.

The sound of preparations for a great public demonstration smote the ear of the philosopher as he stood gazing out of the little open lattice in his chamber.

Rome approached the millennium of her existence, and her children proposed to make the event a festival to be remembered for all time. The meanest Romans were as full of anxiety to display their joy, according to their means, as the Emperor and the patricians. In every palace, in every hut, flowers were twined into garlands to decorate the temples and the altars. In every

street and forum workmen set up triumphal arches and scaffolding to be covered with Tyrian purple. From all quarters of the earth came sacrifices to the divinity of the world—gold and silver, jewels and embroidered silk, to enhance the brilliance of her celebration ; while rare wines and fruits were daily unshipped at her quays to increase the luxury of her already overloaded banquets. Nothing would be wanting to make the outward splendour of Rome imposing and awe-inspiring on the great day of her festival. She would lift her proud head unto the heavens, her clay feet would be concealed by her magnificence.

“ O Rome ! ” exclaimed Plotinus, fixing his gaze upon the elevated temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, as if he saw in that grand edifice the mighty city embodied, “ O Rome ! O Rome ! I could weep bitter tears over thee. Will the days of Hadrian and

Augustus never return? Thou vauntedst thyself unto the firmament, but I am not deceived by the false halo which surrounds thee. I know that thy virtue has departed. The weakness and the indolence of thy rulers have scattered it to the winds. By oppression thou dost exhaust and discourage the industries of thy people. For bribes and gifts thou acceptest murderers for monarchs, and condemnest the just. Oh! that one, once so great, should now be fallen so low! Thy invincible legions have but the semblance of might—thy frontiers and fortifications are insensibly undermined, while thou liest at ease in the lap of luxury, and thy fairest provinces are left exposed to the rapaciousness or ambition of barbarians."

"Alas, Plotinus!" ejaculated a voice behind the philosopher, "I fear you speak the sad truth; but you err when you say all

virtue has gone out of the city. Plotinus yet dwells within its gates."

The philosopher turned to regard the speaker, and beheld the portly form of Paulinus.

"Is it thou, my friend?" he said, with a faint smile. "I had forgotten that friendship was a virtue."

"So much in return for my compliment," replied Paulinus. "It begets another. Would that all I said were as fruitful! But the world is dull of comprehension, and wears a puzzled expression when a philosopher speaks wise things. Do you not find it so, O Plotinus?"

"I complain rather of its indifference than of its stupidity," replied Plotinus.

"Can you expect it to think of anything but present pleasure, when its attention is so much distracted?" said Paulinus, pointing out of the window to a group of artificers

who were engaged upon the decoration of a neighbouring house. “Why, my regular patients have forgotten to be sick in this time of garland-weaving.”

“To that fact I am indebted for the sunshine of your presence, I suppose,” said Plotinus. “'Tis seldom Esculapius finds time to pay a visit that does not require him to carry herbs.”

“I had never visited thee, philosopher, had I waited until you bade me bring herbs,” retorted Paulinus.

“True,” replied Plotinus, “you dispense physic, but I dispense with it; Nature is able to recover herself.”

“As you will,” said Paulinus pleasantly; “we will not argue over the subject. Had all the world the prudence of Plotinus, there would be no suffering from over-indulgence. Physicians are indispensable attendants in the train of luxury.”

“And death follows in the wake,” murmured Plotinus. “Ye gods, would that its dread image at the festivals had more power to curb excess!”

“Ah!” replied Paulinus, “the wish is mine also. Our young men have reached the gates of hades before their shadow is at its full. I fear, I fear,” he added, slowly and sadly, “that thy ward Laberius will soon pass the fatal boundary if he does not pause in his career.”

“I know it, I feel it,” said Plotinus, with deep emotion. “But what can I do? My warnings are uttered in vain; I have long struggled against a stream which seems too strong for me. The force of the Sophist is greater than the force I can bring to bear upon the youth of Rome. His eloquence bewilders the understanding of his victims, and his magnificence entices them into the pit. Thou knowest, O Paulinus, how easily

youth falls a prey to temptation such as he offers."

"That do I," replied the physician, "and I thank the gods that I had sufficient common sense to avoid the worst of them. But to return to Laberius. He cannot bear the strain of his present life. Though his constitution appears good, it may break suddenly like that of his mother. Who would have thought that a blossom like the wife of Quintilius would have drooped so soon? I tremble when I look at his pale face, rendered paler every day by the constant revelry in which he indulges. I have spoken to him to no purpose. He laughs at the fatal end which I anticipate. He flees from me. You must speak to him, Plotinus, with more authority. You must cease to reason, you must command."

"I doubt whether a command would not make him the more obstinate," said Plotinus

reflectively. “I would delay the use of that weapon as long as possible. I would lead rather than drive him from the evil.”

“If he would hear thee discourse of the joys of the life of virtue, I believe there would be some chance of reformation,” said Paulinus; “but he will not hear thee. Nay, more, he absolutely avoids thee.”

“It is true,” replied Plotinus sadly. “Except when he has business to do with me I never see his face; and then, if I take the opportunity to speak of the subject which distresses me, he suddenly discovers that the time is unpropitious, and flees like a frightened animal.”

“Such he is,” said Paulinus. “He is the slave of those with whom he associates. Their scoffs bend him to their will. He *dare* not be much with thee. I believe it is positive pain to him to be compelled to abide by thy advice. But Quintilius did

wisely when he gave thee authority over him. The gods make that act a stumbling-block in the way of his destruction!"

"The net over the mouth of the pit which encloses him is strong," said the philosopher reflectively ; "but the meshes may be broken one by one."

"We must break them, O Plotinus," said the physician. "We must break them, if only for the sake of his sisters. Acatia becomes daily more anxious on his account. Her days are numbered, but the gods will yet decrease the number if he does not change his life. She dreads the approaching festivities, as we would dread a wild beast. Innumerable tablets come to me from the sisters. They beseech me to have a care of Laberius. I am to watch over him. I am to check him. He has vowed that he will drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs, and die by the last drop if so fate wills ;

and they are alarmed. What shall we do, O Plotinus? How shall we rescue Laberius?"

"Ay, how shall we rescue Laberius?" echoed Plotinus. "And not only Laberius," he exclaimed, "but all the youths of Rome. Alas, these Sophists! How long, O Fate, wilt thou permit them to dazzle the eyes of men, and spread enticing nets for their destruction? Must I lift up my voice in vain? Will none give ear to my warning? Shall all the words that I have spoken be like writing upon the sand of the sea-shore? Paulinus, my friend, there are times when I stand on the verge of despair—when I think my mission is for nought—when I say unto myself, Thou art fighting against an unconquerable monster."

"The odds seem certainly against you for the present," replied the physician; "but the VENUS is fickle. I have seen her turn

up at the very moment when one was about to cry Lost."

"The gods grant similar fortune now!" said Plotinus; "else Rome falls sooner than I anticipate."

"Treason! treason!" exclaimed Paulinus, laughing. "To what extremes will disappointment drive a man! Will you become a prophet of evil, O philosopher, since you fail to be a creator of good? We have yet heroes within the shadow of the Capitol to prevent such a catastrophe."

"Where are they?" asked Plotinus, with sarcasm. "Luxuriousness engenders effeminacy. Effeminacy weakens the will and the strength. The enemy is at the gate before the sentinel cares to inform the garrison of his approach."

"True," replied Paulinus. "But I believe a necessity would produce hearts of the old valour."

"Probably. But there must be more self-denial and less indulgence," replied Plotinus.

"Perhaps," said Paulinus. "But too much fasting is as hurtful to the constitution as too much feasting. I am for moderation. I do not desire Laberius and his fellows to give up all pleasures, but to take the amusements of life as carefully as I take wine. I like wine, but I know when to leave the cup empty on the table. Bah! I would as soon put a sword through my heart to induce a laugh as nod my head foolishly under a festive garland. I see no reason in over-indulgence, as I said to Claudius Bromius at the baths but an hour ago. Life is brief enough. Why should we shorten it by an immoderate use of the things which make it agreeable?"

"And what answered the elegant Sophist?" asked Plotinus, with some curiosity.

“That a bright life and a brief one, like a meteor, ought to satisfy the wise man.”

“He sees no beyond,” murmured Plotinus. “How is it possible that a man can look around upon the changes in nature, and contemplate no transformation for himself?”

Here a slave entered to announce that the shadow on the dial approached the hour appointed for the philosopher’s lecture, and Plotinus immediately began to make the necessary preparations.

“The gods having granted me a brief holiday,” said Paulinus, “I will hear thee. I will wait for thee below.” And he descended the narrow stairs which led to the vestibule of the house. From thence he sauntered into the portico, and stood filling up the entrance with his portly figure, greeting such of the pedestrians as he knew, and smiling beneficently at the strangers.

Suddenly Laberius passed by.

The young priest was walking hurriedly, and would have avoided the physician had he seen him. He started at the sound of the well known voice, and quickened his steps.; but Paulinus was not one to lose an opportunity. “The gods befriend me,” he said to himself. “They have sent him in time for the lecture.” And tucking up his toga, he went shouting after him, and telling the people who were before to arrest his progress.

Laberius was compelled to pause.

“What is it, O Paulinus ?” he asked, with a shade of vexation in his accent.

“What is it!” echoed the physician, wiping the sweat from his brow. “Do you pay no more respect to the voice of the ancients? Oh, this is a perverse generation! Whence go you?”

“You will hear, though I do not tell you,” said Laberius, reddening. “To Laurentum.”

"What do you there?" asked Paulinus, assuming a stern countenance. "Did I not forbid thee to go thither for Acatia's sake?"

"You did," replied Laberius; "but I seek not Acatia. The priestess of Vesta sends me with a message unto Valaria. She cannot make up her complement of virgins to sing in the propitiatory hymn, and desires the aid of thy sister."

"You must make a fatiguing journey if you go to her on foot," said Paulinus. "Does not the priestess of Vesta know that my sister has gone to Baiæ for a season? She would see the latest fashions before she presents herself at the games. Oh these women, they are so vain! You will live long before you compass the vanity of woman."

"Ye ill Fates!" muttered Laberius.

"What say you?" said Paulinus. "The

Fates often cast a man upon the earth that a new fortune may set him upon his feet. I think I can help thee. Come with me, and I will consider what I can do."

"Where do you go?" inquired Laberius.

"Where all the wise go when they have time," answered the physician—"to hear Plotinus."

Laberius shrugged his shoulders. "I will meet thee after the lecture," said he.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Paulinus, grasping the young man's arm. "Why should you not attend, and hear words of wisdom?"

"Strange wisdom," replied the young priest, seeking to free himself; "it is wisdom quite opposed to mine."

Paulinus laughed outright. "Why, your ideas are only half fledged," said he. "And till you sit in the shadow of your guardian they will remain so."

"Will not the shadow of another philo-

sopher answer the same purpose?" said Laberius, a little annoyed.

"No," replied Paulinus decidedly. "There is no philosopher in Rome like Plotinus—none in the world who is so calculated to be of service to thee, if thou wouldest only hear him."

"Why should I hear him?" said the young priest. "I will not hear him."

"Ay, so," exclaimed the old physician, smoothing his beard. "Then this whisper about you in the forums is true. Your friends say you are mad on one point, but I would not believe it. They said you were determined not to hear Plotinus. What folly, what simple madness! It is impossible not to laugh in your face. Even Cladius Bromius, who would as soon touch hemlock as lead a life of virtue, was at the lecture the other day. It is the fashion to hear Plotinus."

“What!” muttered Laberius, with his lips trembling. “He makes most ridicule of the philosopher, and advises us against his company.”

“That is likely,” replied Paulinus. “He is wise. He desires to get all the material he can gather to sharpen his own wit. But here comes Plotinus. Go thy way, Laberius, priest of Jupiter; I would not persuade a man against his will.”

But Laberius, hitherto wont to avoid his guardian, remained immovable.

“*Vale, Laberius!*” cried the physician, turning to meet Plotinus. “The gods speed thee on thy errand for the priestess of Vesta! Perhaps, after all, thou wilt find some one to help thee in thy difficulty better than I.”

“What is it?” said Plotinus, approaching the young priest with a grave countenance.

“The physician jokes,” replied Laberius, in a vexed tone.

"I would have him go to thy lecture," said Paulinus, laughing, "but he is afraid of corruption. He fears to risk thy philosophy, O Plotinus!"

"Is it so, Laberius?" said Plotinus, smiling.

"The truth is not to be found, so I enter on no vain search," answered the young priest.

"The truth is to be found," said Plotinus impressively. "Come with me, and hear where I expect to find it."

"And learn to exhaust myself in dreams," said the young priest.

"Do you not exhaust yourself in the pursuit of pleasure?" retaliated Plotinus. "I wonder who is wiser?"

"Come," said Paulinus. "There is no time for an argument. Ay or nay, Laberius. The Thermæ Antoninianæ are no more than a stone's throw from this place—

ay or nay? Is it true or is it not that you dare not hear Plotinus! *Dare not!* Ha, ha! Only think of such folly. By Jupiter, the son of Quintilius ought to know better. The Lares of thy father will rebuke thee. You *must* hear Plotinus. Laberius, I will take no excuse. Perceive you not that the gods have sent this opportunity?"

Laberius muttered an oath. But Paulinus had retained his grasp upon the young man's arm, and he could not escape. He was compelled to go forward, at least in the direction of the Thermæ, but as he went he looked to the right and the left for anything which would afford him a sufficient plea to avoid the lecture.

Inwardly communing with his unknown God, Plotinus walked before, and his unknown God answered his prayer. Paulinus succeeded in bringing Laberius into the portico.

CHAPTER VII.

PLOTINUS SPEAKS.

“**D**EVOULT, but does not understand morality,” were the first words which Laberius heard. “To me it is a contradiction, but with such contradictions human life abounds ; men suppose that their duty is done when they have performed the ceremonies in the worship of the gods. They separate that worship from life ; yea, they even seek, by a strict performance of ritual, to make compensation for an evil life. They take the gods as they are represented by the poets. Jupiter, Juno, Mars, even Venus and Bacchus, are to them true divini-

ties, and their immoral lives examples for the lives of men. What can we expect of the multitude who have learned nothing better, who have been taught so to believe and so to live? But what shall we say of those who teach them, and who themselves know better? The magistrates, the philosophers, yea, the priests know that the gods of the poets are no gods. Yet they worship them, and encourage the people in superstition and immorality; they call it policy not to disturb the faith of the populace. Policy, forsooth! a fine word, which bears on its very face the mark of perversion. What relates to the government of a state should all be founded on righteousness. It is but a poor policy which keeps the multitude in ignorance and error, which takes delight in their vices, and which crushes the divine within them."

The attention of Laberius was arrested.

These words seemed aimed at himself. He knew that his own religion was merely the perfunctory performance of the duties of his office. In the gods he had ceased to believe ; but their festivals were occasions for mirth, for revelry, for drunkenness, and such like. “ And what could the masses do without these festivals ? ” he went on to ask himself, beginning to find excuses for his position. “ The people must have amusements. They are capable of nothing higher than those which are given them, and without them Rome might rise in revolution. And how can the priests be better employed than in helping to give pleasure to the people ? They come to know us as their friends, and we have an influence over them which is beneficial to the state.” But Laberius was again taken off from this vindication of himself by the words of Plotinus as the philosopher went on.

“The true God is above all gods ; He is the One, and He is only one. He is the Good, the altogether good, without any evil. He is the Infinite, not bounded by any form, inaccessible to sense, and beyond the reach of reason. No thought can embrace Him, for He is beyond all objects of thought. As the sun emits his rays, so does the One send forth an image of Himself. That image is called His Reason, and in that reason are immanent the ideas which are the realities of all that appears to exist. From this reason emanates the soul, which works in matter, and forms it as it wills. The soul, coming from the divine ‘Reason,’ is in a sense divine. It is capable of contact or communion with God ; but it may also fall under the dominion of the sense. The soul has two elements—one indivisible, by which it has likeness to the divine reason, and another divisible, by which it goes out to

produce the material creation. The souls of men, having sunk into matter, become oblivious of their origin. Desiring to be independent of God, they came into the bondage of corruption. They have mistaken slavery for liberty, and now their affections are set upon temporal vanities."

Laberius felt the truth of what the philosopher said. He knew that he had devoted himself to the pleasures of sense, and yet there was an original nature within him which had aspirations after something higher and nobler. He felt like one suddenly arrested. Why was it? What did he feel? Was it the gushing of a new life, or rather was it revived memories of what the soul had known in other conditions of existence? He could not answer: who could? A strange joy passed over him. He could explain no more. His soul answered to what Plotinus said; he felt it was true.

“What man needs,” said the philosopher, “is conversion. He must be turned from his present thoughts, his present life must be changed. He must rise to God. Men may be divided into three classes. One is buried in the sensuous ; to them pleasure is the only good, and pain the only evil. These are given over to work all manner of iniquity. They wallow in sin as the swine in the filth. Will the divine voice ever reach them ? They seem dead to all that is good, or great, or noble. They love the chains of corruption. Another class has attained to respectable morality. They know how to do the duties of life, they have a sense of justice between man and man. They desire to be honourable, and to avoid all that is base ; but they seek to rise no higher. The third class seek union with God. They seek restoration to the divine image. The restless soul suffering disturbance in the material finds rest in union .

with the One. It returns to the Good, and then beholds the source of being, the fountain of all life. God hitherto is the Unknown, but now the soul knows Him by being one with Him. It partakes of the divine nature, the bondage of sin is removed, discord has vanished. Such a soul has come into the everlasting harmony, and dances with joy in and around the substantiality of God. O Romans, ye have sunk to the lowest depths of the material ; your souls are darkened by corruption ; ye are alienated from the life of God. I see the multitudes of this great city, full of natural life, rushing to and fro, bent ever on one object—the pursuit of pleasure. The rich and the poor are alike eager in the race, and are equally doomed to disappointment. The phantom vanishes before they touch it. Sensual pleasures are the illusions that beguile the darkened soul, the cheats, the mere images, the semblances of true

enjoyment. Those who have pursued them most know best their vanity. I need not point to those who have drunk the cup to the dregs and are now weary of life. You can see them in every public place in the city. They crowd the baths, they are carried about by slaves, they are seeking rest and refreshment under the trees in every avenue. The soul has drunk the poison which has found an entrance through the body, and the whole being is sickened unto death. I point not to those whose history and its moral are written in their faces, and these speak with more emphasis than the most loudly articulated words. I appeal to those who have not drunk so deep, to those who have not yet felt the weariness of their life. I ask them if sensual pleasures are satisfying, or is the satisfaction more than transient? Does not the soul murmur accents of rebellion? Does it not groan, and struggle, and fret under

the fetters with which the body seeks to enchain it? Romans, be free! Burst the bonds of corruption! Ye are proud to be Roman citizens. Your armies have conquered the world; and will ye not conquer the lusts which war against the soul?"

Laberius left the portico more displeased with himself than he had ever been before.

"A thrust home, Laberius," said old Paulinus, as they returned together; "but no one keeps to the golden mean. The middle way is the safest. Plotinus will never leave off his awful transcendencies. What has he got to do in the clouds, tracing the origin of souls, and the divine descent of morality, as if moderation were not a sufficient guide without going into inexplicable mysteries and everlasting distinctions between right and wrong? I never go to the depths, and I never rise to the ecstasies, but keep the even tenor of my way

through life, and after death, if there be an *after* for man, I suppose I shall share like my neighbours."

"Plotinus speaks truth," said Laberius, solemnly. "I feel his winged words speaking to that soul of mine,—soul, being, something, I know not what to call it, but something which is of me, which is *me*, and which says I want other pleasures than those which merely come through the senses. I already feel within me some of those delights of which Plotinus speaks,—that rising of the soul into a new region, where there is a feeling of satisfaction, of peace, of enjoyment so befitting my being that it never fails."

"Gone into the skies?" said Paulinus. "Never mind. We shall succeed between us. The philosopher's dreams are more conducive to both health and happiness than getting drunk on the Esquiline, or rioting in the Suburra."

CHAPTER VIII.

A REPRESENTATIVE FOR HEBE.

THE priestess of Vesta found a sufficient number of maidens to sing in the propitiatory hymn without the aid of Valaria. But Fate appeared to relieve her from one difficulty only to plunge her into another. She could find no representative for the goddess Hebe in the grand procession which was to move from the palace of the Cæsars to the banks of the Tiber.

With an air of dejection and an expression of vexation, the Maxima was seated on her ivory couch. She had in one hand a tablet,

which she regarded with knitted brows, and in the other a golden stylus, which she every now and again darted with an angry motion at the tablet which occupied her attention.

She had before her the names of all the noble maidens in Rome, but there was no one among them who satisfied the fastidious Maxima.

“Vesta help me!” she exclaimed impatiently. “If the countenance of a maiden pleases me, her figure is certain to be unsuitable for the character. I shall strike out all the names in the list before I find a Hebe for the pageant.”

The irritated and perplexed vestal nibbled the end of her stylus, and reconsidered her tablets. A heavy burden was upon her shoulders; she must find a representative for the goddess of youth, with charms equal to those of the other representatives; but the chorus for the propitiatory hymn and

the prearranged processions seemed to have absorbed all the eligible beauty and grace of Rome.

She tapped her sandalled foot at intervals upon the tessellated floor, and glanced up angrily from time to time at the circle of vestals who busied themselves around her. A profound silence, broken only by the sound of the shuttle and the click of the embroidery needle, reigned in the chamber. Not one of the white-robed company dared to speak when a cloud was on the brow of the Maxima. Too close a proximity was also dangerous, for if some hapless maiden should chance to distract her attention by an accidental movement—by the mere touch, perhaps, of her flowing sleeve—punishment was certain to follow.

Suddenly the heavy tapestry over the entrance to the *Tablium* was lightly lifted, and a young maiden, whose office was that

of special attendant upon the Maxima, advanced.

It was evident that she brought a message, and the Maxima asked sharply what it was.

"A visitor, august lady," replied the vestal. "Valaria, who has just returned from Baiæ, calls to inquire after your health."

"Bid her enter," replied the Maxima, with a brighter countenance. Then she laid the tablets down by her side, and heaved a sigh of relief.

The visit of Valaria, ever ready with ideas and suggestions, was like a burst of sunshine.

"Vesta has pity upon me," exclaimed the Maxima, as the widow entered, radiant with smiles and the latest fashions prevalent in Baiæ. "She sends Valaria to my rescue."

All the vestals smiled, and began to chatter in whispers over their work.

"The great goddess honours me if she makes my service of use to her chief priestess," answered Valaria, carelessly seating herself on the Maxima's couch, and appropriating the Maxima's fan of feathers to her own use.

The proud vestal resented, by a slight frown, the liberties which the sprightly widow seemed to take so naturally, but she could swallow her pride when she had an object. So she said, without the faintest tone of annoyance in her accents,—

"I cannot find a Hebe for the procession. Here is a list of all the patricians' daughters, and there is not one of sufficient grace and beauty for the part who has not another duty to perform."

The heart of Valaria leaped. "Say you so?" she exclaimed. "Then in truth am I sent to thee from the gods, for I can tell thee of a bower where thou wilt find a

nymph so like the goddess that she might well be mistaken for her very self."

"A libation to Fortune!" exclaimed the Maxima. "Who may be thy nymph?"

"Her name is Iope," replied Valaria. "Thou hast surely heard me speak of her pretty face? She is the Greek ward of Plotinus, whom the philosopher brought from Alexandria."

"Ay, I remember," said the vestal. "Where is she now?"

"Buried in the villa of Quintilius," replied the widow, with a sigh; "running like a wild fawn among the woods in the neighbourhood of Laurentum, ignorant that her beauty is sufficient to win the heart of an emperor. I would have brought her to Rome, but I knew not what excuse to offer the philosopher. He would have scoffed at that of mere sight-seeing, for he despises even the little pleasures which make existence tolerable."

“Thou hast sufficient reason for bringing her hither now,” said the Maxima; “for on thy recommendation she shall represent Hebe. Go, therefore, and say to the philosopher that I have need of his ward.”

“Indeed, august lady,” replied Valaria, fanning herself vigorously, “I fear I should be but a poor messenger on such an errand. Plotinus would suspect that I had petitioned thee for the honour.”

“Folly, folly,” answered the Maxima. “Thou canst tell him how the matter came about.”

“And he would ask me if I did not think it was a pity to disturb the child when she was contented,” replied Valaria; “and then he would argue, and I should be overcome, and the result would be failure. Would it not be better to go thyself, O learned Maxima, and then might would be pittied against might?”

"It is true," said the flattered vestal.
"I will lose no time."

"Better not," replied the widow, rearranging her *palla* for departure. Then she added, naively, "And I pray thee say nothing of my return from Baiæ."

"Where shall I find thee after my visit?" asked the Maxima, ignoring the last remark.

"At the house of my brother, the physician Paulinus," replied the widow. "I abide there until after the games." And with a gay *Vale* she departed, well satisfied with the result of her visit.

The Maxima ordered her chariot. She was not one to delay carrying out her intention, and in a few minutes her stately vehicle with its lictors and attendants was seen moving rapidly though pompously down the street.

The philosopher was reading when the vestal was announced.

He rose reluctantly to receive his unusual visitor, but concealed his regret at the interruption caused by her advent by offering her all the homage which her exalted position accustomed her to expect.

She explained briefly the object of her visit.

“August lady,” replied Plotinus, “it is not well for youth to be actors in public scenes ; this fosters vanity, exposes them to temptation, and gives them a love for the frivolities of the world. If society is to be regenerated we must be careful in the training of youth.”

“Revered Plotinus,” rejoined the Maxima, “what better training can youth have than to be early employed in the service of the gods ? Our rejoicings will all be made to the glory of the celestials who have founded the city, protected it till now, given it victory throughout the world, and who

promise to be its guardians for unnumbered generations yet to come. What is there more beautiful than the ancient faith of a Roman? Sun, moon, and stars shed upon us the lustres of their own brightness. They look down beneficently from their lofty thrones. The deities of Olympus have ever watched over the city, and the hearts of the Romans have exulted in the guardianship of the gods. Was there ever a people more devout than we are? See what hosts of temples adorn the hills of Rome. What deity has not here his worshippers? We receive the gods of all lands. Altars are flaming in every part of the city. Sacrifices innumerable are daily offered. The temples are full of the smoke of incense, and the oxen which are slain in the worship of the gods afford a joyful feast to the delighted worshippers."

"True, august Maxima," answered Ploti-

nus ; “ and the people make the feasting the chief part of their religion. The gods as they exist in fable are the gods of the multitude. They know nothing of the truth which underlies these fables. They know no true divinity ; they are ignorant of the One, the Good. Sunk in the corruption of the material, they know nothing of true worship, and serve the gods only with feasting, revelling, and riot. Such is plainly the worship by which the foundation of the city is to be celebrated.”

“ Must we not rejoice ? ” said the Maxima ; “ and do the gods forbid rejoicing ? ”

“ Certainly not,” said Plotinus ; “ but should we not forbid ourselves rejoicing if our rejoicings are a snare to the people, and help to encourage them in licentiousness and superstition ? ”

“ Alas ! ” exclaimed the Maxima, “ are we to deny ourselves for the sake of the multi-

tude? Are the gods to have no sacrifices because the people make them the occasions of immorality, as you choose to call it? What know we but that the gods themselves, who delight in feasting, may not also delight in the feasts of the people? The gods do not live like philosophers. They have no knowledge of the immutable morality of the Platonists."

"And therefore," said Plotinus, "they are no gods."

"I fear," added the Maxima, "that Plotinus verges on the atheism of the Christians."

In glancing round the chief priestess of Vesta had discovered the character of the roll of papyrus which she had found Plotinus reading.

"Yes," he said, "if to reject the popular representations of the gods be atheism; if to make morality the chief part of worship be atheism; if to regard the Creator and First

Father of all things as unlike to any form in heaven or earth ; if, I say, that be atheism, then am I an atheist."

"How shall I argue with thee, O perverse philosopher ?" exclaimed the Maxima ; " who can fathom thy depths ? Wilt thou have this maiden to live without a religion ?"

"The gods forbid !" murmured Plotinus.

"Then why should she not take part in the ceremonies of the national religion ?"

"It is not a ceremony, but a pageant in which you offer her a part, august lady."

"Of pageants our ceremonies are formed," answered the Maxima impatiently. "We must impress the people through the eye. Personify the virtues, and the people will remember them."

"It were better to let them see them in exercise," remarked Plotinus.

"The monitor is too unobtrusive," said the Maxima, with a slight curl of her lip.

“ It is eloquence, not example, which brings thee followers. Wert thou silent, thy blameless life would pass unnoticed ; and did we never present our religion conspicuously before the populace, it would soon cease to be. Therefore have we gorgeous temples, processions of priests, and incense continually ascending.”

“ Then it must be hollow,” said Plotinus, smiling.

“ I judge not,” answered the Maxima. “ It has beneficial ends, whatsoever be its nature. It exercises an influence over the people, through their superstition, at times when they would otherwise be unmanageable. It ought, therefore, to be encouraged by the wise. Hear thou, Plotinus : if our religion is imperfect, it lies with such as thee to bring it to perfection ; but while you seek for us a god possessing in himself all the better attributes of those we know, shall

we cease to pour out libations unto the deities,—the parts, as thou callest them, of thy ONE.”

“It would be better not,” said Plotinus.

“And yet you would refuse Hebe a representative,” said the vestal, reproachfully. “O philosopher, canst thou do that and honour the gods?”

“O Hebe! know,” exclaimed Plotinus, “I refuse not the services of my ward unto thee; but I dread the temptations which pleasure will strew before the innocent Iope.”

“Folly! folly!” replied the Maxima; “I pledge thee my word as a vestal, that she shall come to no harm. Come, O Plotinus, thou hast no good reason to refuse my request, unless—unless,” she added, pointing contemptuously at the roll of Christian writings which was lying open upon the table, “you are about to be governed by that.”

Plotinus answered not. He stood still, with a thoughtful expression upon his countenance. Long, long he meditated, but the vestal Maxima interrupted him not. She felt that her last shaft had struck deep, and she had but to wait for the result. Slowly, reluctantly, it was forced from the lips of the philosopher.

“ You are right, august vestal,” he said, “ I cannot find a further reason for a denial. I grant Hebe her representative.”



CHAPTER IX.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

HE Christian Church was by this time a considerable power to Rome. It had grown up like the growth of nature, in secrecy and in silence. Since the day that it had its converts in Cæsar's household, its increase had been steady. Persecution did not arrest it, but rather helped its progress. The thunderstorm that bursts over nature threatens destruction, but it is followed by rain and sunshine ; and so the persecutions that befel the first Christians left a blessing behind them. The bonds of the community became closer.

They lived more apart from the heathen world, and their ardour in their own cause was more intense. Another result was that all insincere members dropped off as the lifeless leaves from a tree. The Church was then truly the kingdom of God, and the world felt the influence of the purity that existed in its midst. In Rome alone, not including the suburban towns of Ostia, Portus, and Tibur, which had bishops of their own, there were besides the bishop forty-seven presbyters, seven deacons, and many sub-officers. During the long peace there had been many intestine strifes, but the old fire, which burned in the Roman Christians, was not yet extinguished.

The Bishop of Rome was old Fabian—devout, decided, a firm believer, but prudent and wary, no enthusiast, and yet with sufficient faith to make a martyr. It fell to him to introduce into the Church the first of the

Roman emperors who professed Christianity. Philip's sincerity has been questioned, but how great must have been the influence of the Church if it was policy of the emperor to declare himself a Christian ; yet the empire was divided. It was necessary to yield something to the adherents of the old religion, necessary to gratify the multitude who still took pleasure in the old customs and the old festivities. To Fabian it was a sad hour when he heard of the part the emperor was to take in the celebration of the millennium. He did not stand up in the streets and testify against the apostacy, but he mourned in silence, and he took counsel with his presbyters and his flock as to the conduct which would be most becoming and most beneficial to the Church. Some there were who could bear no restraint, eager spirits who felt within them a divine call to denounce, in high places, the abominations

of idolatry. They would have gone forth and risked their lives by the utterance of vehement and burning words. Without such men Christianity would have made but little progress in the world. Yet those of Fabian's spirit have not been of less service. They have waited their time, and done their work not in a spirit of rash enthusiasm, but by prudence and watchfulness.

The counsel which prevailed at this time was silence and endurance. The Church had learned to speak with bated breath. Confident of the final victory, it did not make haste.

On the departure of the Maxima, Plotinus closed up the Christian books, and went to the house of Fabian.

The Christian bishop and the Platonic philosopher had long been friends, and had learned to look upon each other as aiming at

the same object, though not seeing eye to eye as to the means. Outside of the Christian community there was no one whom Fabian esteemed more than Plotinus, and when the philosopher came, the bishop saluted him with a hearty greeting. Bishops of Rome there have been, as well as bishops of other places, who believed that no one could be saved outside the visible Church, and that there were no good men except under the Christian name. But Fabian was among those wise Christians of the early days who recognised in good heathens fellow-soldiers fighting the same battle for the kingdom of God.

“We are sad when others rejoice,” said the bishop: “but this we expect so long as we have to contend with the flesh and the devil, who are the rulers of this world.”

“True,” said the philosopher; “we both weep over lost souls. Once they were

ethereal and heavenly, but they have descended into matter, and after suffering deprivation have sunk deep into the Hades of sensuality. They have no perception of spiritual truth. When their souls leave the bodies they are still dark and deformed, and must often return in new material forms before they learn to rise to the divine and escape the pollutions of the terrestrial world."

"Plotinus," said Fabian, "this is the dream of thy philosophy. It is true men are sunk in sensuality, but these transmutations are not necessary. The Son of God has come in human form. God Himself has taken manhood into His Godhead, and after descending into the Hades of death and corruption He overcame the destroyer. Through Him, the Conqueror, we can burst the fetters that bind the soul, and rise victorious over every foe. He has founded

in the world a kingdom of heaven—a kingdom or society of men who by their profession are bound to pursue the righteous life. In the Christian community are many truly regenerated souls. They already breathe the atmosphere of another world. To complete their redemption they have only to be delivered from the burden of the flesh."

Plotinus had heard all this before. There was much of it that he believed, and much that he could not understand. He paused as if in want of words to express himself at once, or as if he wished cautiously to separate the truth from what he reckoned mere opinion. He knew that practically he had the same object before him as the Christians had, but they believed many things which he did not and could not believe.

"Fabian," he said, "the likeness of your words to mine astounds me, and, if I mistake

not, there is also a similarity of the ideas expressed in the words. You speak of the flesh, the body of death, the bondage of corruption, and of these as fetters and impediments to the soul. This is all, surely, the deepest truth that man can know. But how could the Deity descend to the Hades of death? The Godhead is ineffably pure, free from all contact with matter. He could not come within the form of that which limits. He could not touch impurity. Jesus of Nazareth, as men speak of Him, may have been a divine Teacher, but how could God be incarnate, how could He possibly be clothed with human flesh? How could He put on this vile body, eat and drink like vulgar mortals, suffer at the hands of cruel men, be put to death and laid in the grave? Godhead cannot come down to man, cannot thus suffer as man, but man, by the perfection of the soul, and by its libera-

tion from the bonds of sense, must rise to the divine. There is an order in nature, an everlasting progress towards perfection and purity. Individual souls through the contact with matter sink into the Hades of corruption ; but they will rise again, and after suffering for their misdeeds, perhaps in many different bodies, they shall at last be united to God, the Source of life and perfection.”

“ Plotinus,” said Fabian, “ what dream is this ? How can matter in itself be evil ? What is there in the body, considered simply as a body, that is opposed to good ? Our bodies are the workmanship of God. They may be temples of the Holy Ghost. Why may not God have taken a human form, and as man lived and suffered in the world ? ”

“ Fabian,” said Plotinus, “ I have seen no difference between your way of speaking of

the body and mine. Do not the writers of your Scriptures call it flesh, corruption, and bondage, and do they not speak of ‘this vile body’? Is it not a tabernacle of clay in which the soul is burdened, and from which it longs to be free? I cannot think of God dwelling in a body. I cannot think of the Infinite under the limitations of a material form. A created soul might descend into matter, but for God that is impossible.”

“Plotinus,” said Fabian, “two things seem to be here confounded. Perhaps Christian language is not always definite, but when we speak of the body as the dwelling-place of sin, or as that flesh in which there is no good thing, we mean the body in its fallen condition, not the body as God made it, but as corrupted by sin. The vile body is that which is doomed to death; but we also speak of the body glorious, or that which is incorruptible, which is

sinless, and is no burden to the soul. I know not where Plotinus can find fault. He also speaks of taking care of the body as the musician takes care of his lyre so long as it is fit for use. If he also speaks of subduing the flesh to the spirit, or of attenuating his body till it becomes soul, does he not mean body considered as it now is—the body corruptible, and does he not mean the same as we do when he speaks of the vicious soul, whether in the body or out of the body? We say of such a soul that it is carnal. It has come under the dominion of the flesh, and knows no other life but that of sense. But this we say, not because flesh is in itself evil, but because the soul which ought to preserve harmony in the body by having dominion over it has lost its dominion, and is in bondage to the flesh. And for the other and deeper question, why, O Plotinus, may not the One who is Being,

or, as you say, above being, go forth into a human form? I know that I can only speak on such a subject with a faltering tongue, for words are inadequate to express our thoughts, and thoughts are often inadequate to compass the truth. We cannot think of God in His absolute being, but as mind or intellect He becomes comprehensible to our minds. His Word or Wisdom goes forth through all creation, and why may not that Word or Wisdom have been manifested in its fulness under a human form? The Incarnation solves all the difficulties of your philosophy. It tells us that nothing is vile as God has made it, that matter and body are in themselves perfectly free from sin. There is nothing sinful in having a body, in eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage. The sin is when men think only of these things, when they so indulge and pamper their bodies that the servant be-

comes the master, the soul carnal, and sinks besotted into what you have fitly called the Hades of sensuality. The Christian honours the body and looks for its deliverance. He struggles for its restoration to its proper place as the servant of the purified soul. As its members have been the servants of iniquity; he strives now to make them the servants of righteousness. Christ he calls the Saviour of the body.. Instead of making a show of wisdom by neglecting this tabernacle and despising it, he seeks to glorify God in his body. By purity, by sobriety, by chastity, he seeks the dominion over corruption. The flesh in every man still struggles against the soul, so that the best of us cannot do the things that we would. As Paul expresses it, ‘even we that have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of the body.’ ”

CHAPTER X.

LABERIUS VISITS LAURENTUM.

HEN Valaria heard that Plotinus had assented to the vestal Maxima's request, she proposed that Laberius should be sent to fetch his cousin to Rome.

“ He has looked strangely ill of late,” said she, “ and a breath of the sea air will do him good.” But she thought in her heart, It is better for Laberius to go : his sisters will not raise so many objections ; for she knew they would not approve of the visit.

“ He has looked strangely ill,” she said to Paulinus.

“ That is quite true, O sister,” replied the

physician. “The philosophic lecture was a dose too strong for his weak body. They tell me that he has not been in the vicinity of Claudius Bromius since the day he heard Plotinus speak, and that he hath avoided all his late companions. I wager twenty sesterces there will be keen war between the indulgent Sophist and the abstemious Egyptian if the stern philosophy of Plotinus attracts the followers of his brilliant opponent. O goddess Minerva! whisper in the ear of Bromius that the loss of one or two men unto the enemy is not the loss of the battle. It is surely better that Laberius should walk the lecture halls of the philosopher than the mysterious regions of Hades ; and to the latter goes he certainly if he doth not cease this rioting. Yes, yes, send him to Laurentum.”

But Laberius protested that the preparation for the sacrifices would not afford him time.

Paulinus, however, was able to laugh the excuse out of the field, and the young priest soon afterwards found himself borne swiftly along the high road towards Laurentum. On, on, on, O Gallic palfreys! As the fresh air from the Campagna touched the brow of the young priest, the burden which was upon his mind appeared to become lighter; but before he reached the foot of the rugged path which led him to the villa gardens the sense of depression which had troubled him returned with all its original intensity, and it was with a melancholy countenance that he presented himself before his sisters.

They were seated in the peristylium of their beautiful abode. A playing fountain sent up its jets of perfumed water. A number of beautiful plants arranged in elegant vases, and suspended in graceful baskets, spread their foliage around. Many of them were in full bloom, and their soft, brilliant

petals were displayed to advantage against the pure white marble of the columns which supported the roof, and the artistic drapery festooned over the various portals. Quintilia was busied with her distaff and her thoughts, but her industry and her reverie were occasionally interrupted by her anxiety about Acatia, who was more than usually sensitive to the warmth of the atmosphere. The invalid reclined on a cushion covered by a lion skin, which had been placed close by the basin of the fountain. Iope sat at her feet fanning her with a plume of feathers, and occasionally dipping a napkin into the water for her refreshment.

As Laberius appeared, a glad cry of welcome was uttered by Iope, the feathers and the napkin were hastily thrown aside, and she sprang forward to grasp his hand. The sisters, less demonstrative, were not less affectionate. Quintilia rose with her rare

sweet smile, and Acatia silently stretched forth her arms. Returning the greetings of his cousin and his elder sister, the young priest bent over the prostrate Acatia, and an involuntary thanksgiving escaped his lips as he observed that the fair face was looking much as usual, though the weary attitude of the slight figure expressed the measure of its weakness.

“O brother!” exclaimed Acatia, observing the thin face of Laberius, “how ill thou lookest! Thou hast over-exerted thyself in the city. Thou art fatigued by the journey hither.”

“No,” answered Laberius, seating himself by her side; “it is thought which makes my cheek hollow and my eye dim.”

“Did not Claudius Bromius supply thee with a charm against the voice of the heart?” asked Quintilia softly.

“Speak not of Claudius Bromius,” replied

the young priest ; "I have eschewed his company."

"Thank the gods," murmured Acatia, pressing the hand which rested upon hers. "We poured out libations day and night for thy preservation. We feared thy wild life would rob us of thee early, O our brother."

"See here," said Iope, lifting up a half-finished garland. "This is for the altar of Hygeia. When the sun sets, Quintilia places it at her feet, and cries, 'O merciful goddess, remember Acatia and Laberius.'"

"Hush, little chattering bird!" said Quintilia. "Finish weaving the garland."

"There are not sufficient flowers in the basket," murmured Iope, with a pouting lip; "and thou hast forbidden me to gather these." She touched a few of the blossoms which were nearest to her.

"Are there not sufficient flowers in the garden?" replied Quintilia. "The oleanders

by the great spreading tamarisk tree are blooming richly. Go and pluck as many as ye will. The sun is surely not too fierce for thee, thou butterfly."

"Oh no, no," laughed Iope; and lightly whirling a veil about her head she sped along the peristylium to the further end, and down the flight of marble steps into the garden. Her feet scarcely touched the grass, and her garments floated like white clouds about her form.

"She is lovely indeed," remarked Labe-rius, gazing with admiration after the graceful little figure of his young cousin; "a most perfect Hebe!"

"She has no depth of character," said Quintilia, reseating herself and resuming her distaff.

"Quintilia, sweetest," answered Acatia, "you judge harshly; Iope is still a child."

"Seventeen summers old?" murmured Quintilia; "I was grave at that age."

"Thou wert always grave, my sister. To be thoughtful was part of thy nature ; but it is not the nature of Iope. Look at her face ; it is the face of a child, it expresses only innocence and enjoyment of life. Her mind is incapable of being disturbed. Those changes which pass over it are the reflections of our moods. We smile, and she is happy ; we sigh, and the tears flow from the blue eyes."

"True," replied Quintilia ; "and yet I would that it were possible to make some serious impression upon her mind, for I like not to think of a sudden blow transforming Iope from a child into a woman."

"Do not speak of it," said Acatia ; "the gods ward off such an evil day !"

"What serious impression would you make ?" asked Laberius bitterly ; "man is happier without thought."

"I would impart to her the sense of

what is right and what is wrong," said Quintilia.

"What *is* right?" inquired the young priest. "Is it defined?"

"Yes," said Quintilia, "in the breast of every mortal. Instinctively I feel what is wrong, and I obey the feeling. They do wrong who disregard the inward monitor. Brother," she added, drawing close to Laberius, and placing her hands upon his shoulder, "tell me, wert thou not reproved of thyself all the while thou wert led by Bromius the Sophist? Hast thou not at last listened to the voice of thy heart, and withdrawn from the scenes which threatened thee with destruction?"

"Yes," replied Laberius; "but I scorned the voice of my heart until I was brought under another influence."

"Is it the influence of Plotinus?" asked Acatia, in a whisper.

“Yes,” replied Laberius sadly. “The philosopher hath opened mine eyes. He hath shown me the folly of my life—the precipice on which I stood. He hath drawn me back from destruction, and bidden me seek the protection of a God compared with whom our gods are not much more than mortal men ; but, alas ! alas !” he added, with a bitter cry, “he knows not where that perfect God is to be found. He hath closed one door, and he hath not opened another. I stand in the dark, groping, groping with a consciousness that the light is somewhere to be found, but I know not where to turn.”

“And yet,” said Acatia, “I bid thee have faith ; I feel that the deity of Plotinus is no mere phantasy.”

It was at this solemn moment that the young Greek returned with her burden of flowers, which she emptied at the feet of Acatia.

Acatia lifted a rose which was more beautiful than all the other blossoms.

"It is a pity that such a lovely object should be doomed to fade," she said mournfully; "that all things should be condemned to death and decay."

"It would be no cause for regret if we had the certainty of another life," answered Quintilia; "but it is sad to think that the most beautiful is the first to fade."

"Iope," said Laberius, anxious to change the conversation, "what say you to a visit to Rome?"

The young Greek clapped her hands gleefully.

"Have you come to fetch me, O cousin?" she asked.

Laberius nodded.

"You cannot be serious?" said Acatia, turning pale; "Rome is not a place for Iope at this madly festive season, and we

would not have her see its wickedness. Plotinus would not wish it."

"Whatever he may wish," said Laberius, uneasily, "he has promised the vestal Maxima that Iope shall make her appearance in the procession as the representative of Hebe."

Iope uttered an expression of rejoicing.

"Hush, child!" said Acatia, with a sigh; "you know not what you do."

"Brother," said Quintilia, regarding Laberius with a stately severity, "could you not have prevented this?"

"I knew not of it," replied Laberius. "The vestal Maxima spoke to me about the hymn only, and directed me hither to consult with Valaria, but as I was on my way to find a *rhedā* for the purpose, I heard she was at Baiæ, and I was persuaded by Paulinus to hear our guardian discourse of virtue."

"Blessed accident!" murmured Quintilia, in a scarcely audible voice.

"O Laberius," sighed Acatia, "thou knowest that the little Iope will be changed if she goeth into Rome and heareth the voice of flattery."

"So said Plotinus to the vestal Maxima when she made her request," said Laberius; "but the august lady had more powerful arguments."

"Alas! alas!" said Acatia; "do you not perceive the shadow of Valaria in the matter, O Quintilia?"

"What more likely?" replied Quintilia; "but," she added, softly, "what is done is done, sweet sister, and we must not offend the chief priestess of Vesta."

"The gods have her in their keeping, then," murmured Acatia, scarcely able to refrain from weeping.

And so preparations were made for the journey.

CHAPTER XI.

THE YOUNG PATRICIAN.

PAULINUS the physician had promised to meet Laberius and his cousin by the Porta Ostia.

Accordingly at the specified time he proceeded thither in his private lectica, in which vehicle it was proposed that Iope should finish her journey under the guardianship of the physician, while Laberius went on in the rheda to his lodging near the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill.

It was about the seventh hour in the day when Laberius and Iope arrived in sight of the Ostian Gate. The young Greek was

greatly excited by the prospect of enjoyment before her, and Laberius found himself more than once compelled to give an account of the stupendous preparations being made for the games. This he did with an effort, for the interest displayed by Iope sent a pang to his heart. While he gazed at her animated face, and marked with an admiration he had never felt before the perfection of its features and the innocence of its expression, he was haunted by the words of his sisters—the sense of their disapproval.

Many persons and vehicles were waiting in the vicinity of the Ostian Gate, and Iope strained her sight to distinguish among the yet indistinct groups the liveries of the physician's bearers.

“I think I see them, O Laberius!” she cried. “Yes, there stand the tall Syrians in their light red tunics. What a pretty contrast to the dark cedars in the background!

Dost thou observe? I do believe I recognise Paulinus himself! Have I not good eyes?"

"Keep thy veil down, little one," answered Laberius, somewhat curtly.

"I hate veils," said Iope, "and as thou hast permitted me to put it aside all the way, why must I be veiled now?"

Nevertheless she obeyed.

"*Salve*, my children!" cried a jovial voice, and the pleasant, portly figure of the physician suddenly appeared standing in the portico of a villa by the wayside—the villa of a patient.

"*Salve!*" and the driver of the rheda drew up his horses.

"The hour to a shadow. That is punctuality, a very rare virtue. I should have cursed every god in the pantheon if you had kept me waiting, for I have an important appointment at sunset, and he that hindereth a physician may hinder a life. In what

health did you leave the graces of the Quintilian Villa?"

"In their usual health," replied Laberius, "but sorely unwilling to part with Iope. They dread the enchantments of Pleasure."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the physician. "Think they we shall introduce her to the goddess as she presides in the house of Bromius?"

Laberius winced.

"No, no, no!" continued Paulinus. "We are the patrons of moderation. A little wine and a little water, a little food for the body, a little food for the spirit. We will take care that Iope's dose of pleasure shall be neither too weak nor too strong."

The bearers of the lectica approached with their vehicle, and Iope stepped out of the rheda.

"*Vale, cousin,*" said she to Laberius; "when shall I see you again?"

"Who can tell?" answered the young

priest moodily. “The grim ferryman is always in waiting.”

“By the gods!” exclaimed Paulinus, “I thought the breezes of Laurentum would have blown the cobwebs out of thy head! Why must ye slide from one end of the beam to the other when it is possible to sit poised in the middle? Find thy balance, Laberius, or I must treat thee to some bitter drinks. If such is thy mood, I wager an armlet that the pretty Iope will welcome a change of companions. Be seated, Iope, and let us make speed.”

“Do you ride with me?” asked the young Greek, arranging the curtains of the lectica.

Paulinus laughed. “The heart desires,” said he, “but the flesh”—patting his broad breast—“will not permit. Where there is ample room for two of thy proportions, there is scarcely space for one of mine. I will walk by thy side.”

Then the lectica was hoisted on the shoulders of the tall Syrians, and Laberius departed.

Paulinus had directed the bearers to take several bye-streets on their way to the Via Sacra, in order to avoid as much as possible the various inconveniences caused by the multitudes who were thronging into Rome ; but despite all his precautions many stoppages occurred. The physician himself was often obliged to echo the entreaties or the oaths of the slave whose business it was to clear the way before any further progress could be made. It was with great difficulty that the Circus Maximus was reached, and here another pause occurred. The great façade was being decorated for the games, and a curious crowd stood watching the movements of the workmen as they scaled the pillars and the obelisks, and prepared the statues and the trophies for their floral adornments.

Iope was deeply interested in the animated scene, but equally alarmed at the multitude of strange faces and the rude behaviour of those around her. Shrinking behind the silken curtains of the lectica, she alternately entreated Paulinus not to quit her side, and asked him some question relative to the preparations which were going forward or the various objects which attracted her attention.

Suddenly she exclaimed, "Oh, what a handsome chariot, Paulinus! There it stands, by the statue of the great dolphin. See the bronze wheels embossed with a wonderful device. Those heads of Medusa in their centres are verily frightful enough to turn us into stone. The owner must be rich."

"He is rich," said Paulinus, observing the chariot indicated by Iope—"too rich for his own good—the young exquisite with hi_s

golden-curled British charioteer. I know him well. His name is Aulus Camillus, and his father was a man whose son ought to know better. May the shade of Camillus the elder show him the folly of walking in the footsteps of Bromius before he suffers. Verily it is a pity that the philosophy of the Sophist should influence so many of the most promising and most amiable of our young men. He drowns in Falernian the talents which might benefit a nation. The gods assist Plotinus in his work of reformation ! May they rescue Camillus. There he stands, talking to yon rubicund-faced merchant in the Portico, tricked out in the latest fashionable habit. Ye gods, how much broader will the patricians wear their purple hems ? Ah, he sees us—he comes towards us. Draw thy veil, pretty Iope, and I will hear what he has to say.”

Iope somewhat reluctantly did as she was

told ; but it was too late, Camillus had already seen her face, and the face had caused him to dismiss his client suddenly, with a summary promise to attend to his business another time.

“It is one of the beautiful sisters of the priest Laberius,” he said to himself as he hurried towards the spot where the lectica had paused. “The gods befriend me to-day.”

“*Salve, physician!*” he cried gaily, shaking the chain of jewels which hung round his neck and over his breast. “A fine promise of good weather for the coming festivities.”

“Our fair skies are not always to be depended upon,” replied Paulinus ; “but we must hope for the best.”

“I sing in the chorus,” said Camillus, bowing towards the veiled Iope. “Do I see one who is appointed to the same honour ?”

The young Greek shook her head, and Paulinus answered curtly, “ You will know in time, O Camillus;” for the curiosity which the young patrician could not conceal had suddenly awakened in the mind of the physician an idea that he was not a desirable acquaintance for one of the philosopher’s wards. Accordingly he determined to dismiss him promptly. “ Is there no method,” said he, “ by which we can force a passage through these gaping knaves? They are packed together as close as dried grapes. Have at them, Syrus! Elbow them aside, Lucius! Ha, ha! what care they for the fists of my sturdy rogues, when their heads are as hard as the anvil of Vulcan? Nevertheless,” he added, with an oath, “ it is provoking.”

“ Did you never try the effect of a shower of gold?” said Camillus, taking an embroidered purse from the breast of his tunic.

"I wager thee half mine inheritance that it will scatter the multitude to the four quarters of the earth. Room for the lectica!" he cried at the pitch of his voice. "Room for the lectica of Paulinus the physician."

Away went a handful of coins to the right and the left of the street, and in an instant the dense crowd was cleft in twain, its members struggling over each other, and over the bounty of the patrician, while Camillus gracefully waved to the Syrians to take up their charge and proceed.

"Your money was never thrown away in a better cause," said Paulinus, laughing. "The time of a physician is precious."

"What reward shall I have?" replied Camillus.

"What would you?" said the physician. "Advice free of charge? then set a watch over thyself in these wild times."

He moved forward after the lectica as he

spoke, and Camillus, compelled to accept his dismissal, returned to his chariot.

“Drive home without me,” he said to the charioteer, and as the restless white horses started, he plunged into a bye-street, determined not to lose sight of the lectica—trust-ing to see that sweet young face once more.

In the meantime the lectica approached another formidable obstacle to its progress. By the entrance to the Via Sacra was a great company of the roughest plebeians and a number of gladiators circled about a dancer. The poor girl had done her best to amnse them—had collected all the coins they seemed inclined to bestow, and was now desirous to be gone; but the crowd around chose to detain her a prisoner, and every effort she made to escape afforded them brutal amusement. With torn garments and an excited face, with dishevelled hair and flashing eyes, she stood at bay.

"I have fulfilled all your wishes," she cried passionately ; "let me depart!"

"Not yet," was the answer from half-a-dozen tongues. "We will have another dance—another dance, and Lela shall have an *as* for every step."

"Cast your money into the Tiber!" exclaimed Lela ; "or," she added scornfully, "give it to the vintner and quaff oblivion. I have danced, and I will dance no more, although you give me sufficient sesterces for a prince's ransom. Let me go, I say."

An amused, defiant laugh from the rude circle was the only reply.

Lela, goaded into passion, stamped her sandalled foot, and smote the gladiator nearest to her on the breast.

"Did the wing of a fly flick me as it sped past?" he exclaimed, with a good-natured smile ; "or perhaps," he added, making an awkward reverence, "thus the fair Lela

chooses me for a partner ; ” and stepping in front of the angry girl, he mimicked some of the graceful evolutions which she had made in her dance.

The ruffians screamed with delight.

“ Ay, ay,” shouted a voice, “ dance with the giant Marcus, and then he’ll think of thee when he lies sprawling in the dust ! ”

The huge gladiator turned fiercely.

“ Who speaks ? ” he demanded. “ Let him stand forth and test my strength. Think you I am easily dragged into the *spoliarium* ? ”

“ Marcus was always a boaster,” answered the same voice, but the speaker was not to be distinguished.

The gladiator doubled his great fist. “ I will crush thee ! ” he muttered, with gnashing teeth ; “ I will crush thee, whoever thou art ! ”

“ Come, Marcus,” cried the bystanders, “ why should a fly-bite plague thee ? Let

us see if you can dance as well as you can fight.—Now, Lela, the introductory movement.”

But the girl indignantly shook off the hand which was placed persuasively upon her shoulder.

“I will not dance,” she reiterated. “Let the awkward Marcus foot it by himself.”

“Dance, dance,” shrieked the crowd. “We will double thy earning!” cried some. “We will toss thee in thy veil!” screamed others.

Lela answered not. She made another violent effort to escape.

But she beat against the rough circle surrounding her with as much success as a bird beating against the bars of its cage. The more she struggled the greater was the amusement she afforded her tormentors. At length she ceased her futile attempts, and stood at bay with indignant tears in her

eyes. The lectica of Paulinus was in sight. She knew the Syrians of the physician, and there was good hope of a rescue.

“Will no one assist me?” she cried, in a loud, pitiful voice, as the progress of the lectica was stopped.

Paulinus instantly stepped forward. “Romans,” he exclaimed, in his deep, sonorous voice, “what is this—the strong against the weak? That was not the manner of our ancient heroes.”

“The gods save Paulinus!” shouted the populace, who recognised the physician. “How many more of us would be gone to Hades if the servant of Esculapius were not so skilful!”

“Let the maid go,” commanded Paulinus as soon as he could obtain a hearing, “and I vow to physic the next sick one who sends for me without an *obolus*.”

“The gods save Paulinus!” cried the

crowd again. “He keeps death at bay.” But they made no movement to release Lela.

A rescue, however, was at hand. As Paulinus uttered his command for the second time, a man dashed into the midst of the circle, seized the dancer, and carried her to the side of the lectica. So sudden, so unexpected was the act that there was no time for prevention or remonstrance on the part of the crowd.

“Aulus Camillus!” exclaimed the surprised Paulinus.

“Well done, Aulus Camillus!” cried the populace, catching up the name from the lips of the physician.

“There is room for thee in here with me,” said Iope to Lela, peeping out between the curtains. And Aulus Camillus saw the face once more.

Lela stared at the speaker with astonishment.

“The great ladies of Rome,” she replied, “are not accustomed to invite dancers into their carriages.”

“I am no great lady of Rome,” said Iope. And she appealed to Paulinus to second her invitation.

This the physician readily did, for he was anxious to proceed and to dismiss Aulus Camillus, for he was not pleased with the young patrician’s reappearance. He could not understand it.

Lela stepped lightly into the lectica, the curtains were closed by the little hand of Iope, and the Syrians bore it onward through the now scattering crowd.

The fire in the eyes of the dancing girl died away as soon as she found herself free from the tyranny of the populace. Her eyelids drooped, and a sorrowful expression stole over her face.

“Do you like dancing?” asked Iope

when she had examined her companion's costume—the band of Indian coral which confined the curling, unruly locks in some kind of order, the short, low-necked tunic with the little silver-gilt bells shaking in its fringes, the flower-besprinkled skirt with the strange arabesque pattern in its border, the tinkling armlets and anklets, and the ivory inlaid lyre which had been guarded so carefully amid all its owner's struggles to escape from her tormentors. “Do you like dancing?” asked the young Greek.

Lela's reverie was suddenly interrupted.

“Yes,” she answered softly, “I love my art, but I am obliged to exercise it sometimes when I am very weary.”

“Where do you dwell?” inquired Iope.

“I have a poor lodging in the neighbourhood of the Porta Asinaria,” answered Lela, “in the house of Calvus, the crooked iron-smith.”

“And do you live alone?” questioned the young Greek, who was in an inquisitive mood.

“No, lady,” replied the dancer. “I have a sick mother to bear me company.”

Iope suddenly produced a little net of golden thread filled with silver coins.

“I am rich,” said she, dropping it into the lap of the dancer. “Take my purse.”

But Lela put it aside. “Such a great gift is not necessary, O generous lady,” said she, blushing. “The gods have been kind to-day.”

Iope, however, would not take a refusal. “It is for your mother,” she whispered. “The gods are not always kind.”

“That is true,” answered Lela, with a sigh.

The lectica was lifted abruptly from the shoulders of its bearers.

“We are here at last,” cried Paulinus.

“We have accomplished an Herculean labour. All honour to thee, Roma, but I am glad thy festival comes but once in a hundred years.”

“Lady,” murmured Lela, embracing the hands of Iope, “if ever the poor dancer can do anything to repay this kindness, I pray thee command her services.” She sprang forth from the lectica, spoke a few hurried words of thanks in the ear of the physician, who did not hear them, and fled like a fawn down the Via Sacra.



CHAPTER XII.

THE SECULAR GAMES.

THE time of the celebration of the millennium at length arrived. The sun shone gaily on the temples and the palaces of imperial Rome. New life seemed to animate every limb, and every Roman heart bounded with joy. A thousand years had passed over the city. It had risen from the dimension of a few huts, familiar with labour and poverty, to be the mistress of the world. From the stage of conquest it had passed to that of luxury. Philosophers

and moralists had already seen that the foundations were sapped, and were able to speak with certainty of the near approach of its doom ; but to the multitude it seemed as if the Roman people were about to enter on a new, and even a more glorious stage of existence.

The streets of Rome swarmed with human beings by the first streaks of the morning light. Through every gate the crowds poured in from every highway. The celebration was a great national event, and the inhabitants of every station, town, and village were eager to be in Rome. Rich lords from their villas in Tibur, Capua, and Laurentum, with their retinue of attendants, sturdy farmers from the Sabine and Apulian hills, peasants and artisans from the countries of the Aequi and the Volsci, with beggars from Aricia and Bovillæ, filled the highways that led to Rome.

In the Via Labicana, Farmer Ofellus riding on his ass had made the acquaintance of Davus, a deformed slave from Vitellia. As they drew nearer Rome the road became more crowded, and the slave indulged in sallies of wit at the expense of the travellers. The ass of Ofellus had more than once been a subject for his mirth, but as the people increased new objects took his attention. A fat patrician in his rheda was urging a passage through the crowd when Davus shouted, “Holloa! ancient Nasidienus will be too late for his dinner. Clear the way, Ofellus; draw aside your starved ass, and let old Obesity get past you.”

“Hush, Davus! silence!” shouted a eunuch, at the same moment flicking the horsewhip in his face.

“Keep your whip for your own shortcomings, old blackamoor,” answered the slave, laughing in the face of the eunuch;

“ Nasidienus admires the original simplicity of the Roman people, but may he not celebrate Rome’s millennium without his oysters and his lampreys ?”

“ Take care of your head, Davus,” cried Ofellus, as the rheda got in advance of the donkey.

At this moment the Laconian shepherd, Aufidus, made his appearance in the crowd. He was a tall skeleton, measuring seven feet two inches in height, and wearing a wolf’s skin for his upper garment.

“ Good morning, Father Romulus,” cried Davus, “ preserved here the simplicity of the ancient race for a thousand years ! O sylvan-born and wolf-suckled, fed on the east wind ! how must you rejoice to see the Quirites of the day that now is ! You never felt the joy of gout in your bones. Stalk on, adumbrated shadow of old Roman life !”

The shepherd wished to be angry ; but

the slave's jests excited the laughter of the other travellers, and a smile passed over the wan features of the pastoral face. Ofellus again counselled Davus to be more serious, and to save himself from the possible chastisement of some offended lord or eunuch.

"By the thunders of Tarpeian Jove," exclaimed Davus, "here comes a fellow with his kitchen on his back. He intends to keep Rome warm. O glorious days of Saturn, when one man was as good as another, and all feasted together on roasted acorns and pure water from the crystal fountain! These days have returned, Ofellus. This night you and I shall feast on the Campus Martius, and perhaps sleep together on the steps of some patrician's mansion. Ho, ho! give the old ass another kick. It is easy to reach his bones protruding in every direction."

Just as these words were uttered the city

gate was reached, and the travellers mingled in the great ocean of human life that was surging through the streets of Rome.

It was noonday, and still the multitudes continued to flood the city. A true Satur-nalian revel had begun. The public places were all occupied as encampments, and the smoke of caldrons ascended under every green tree. Peasant families had settled by the very gates of the richest citizens, and the greatest and proudest Romans for once spoke to them as members of the same family. The nationality of the Romans came to the surface, obliterating all distinctions of class, of wealth, poverty, luxury, and simplicity. It was enough for a man to be a Roman, to feel that he was at home in Rome.

While the crowds were gathering in the city, preparations were being made for the *fêtes* that the people had come to see. The

vestal Maxima had arranged with the Emperor for the great procession to the banks of the Tiber, and the ceremonies that were to inaugurate the celebration of Rome's millennium. As the daylight began to depart torches blazed in the Campus Martius, making the city as brilliant as under the glare of the sun. The Column of Antoninus was like a mountain irradiated with flames. Huge torches hung from the mausoleum of Augustus. The Pantheon seemed on fire. The whole base of the Capitoline was a stream of light. Long lines of flame ran from hill to hill, passing through every square and avenue, and along the bank of the river, making the waters of the Tiber sparkle like a fountain in a fairy land.

Towards midnight there was a moving of the dense masses of people. The music of a thousand instruments echoing among the seven hills announced that the procession

had started from the Capitol. It was headed by the sons of patrician and consular families, by the heirs of orators and statesmen—the flower of Rome, the hope on which the proud imperial city rested her foundations of future greatness. Trumpeters and harpists, lute and flute players followed, and these were the heralds of a great multitude appointed to take a part in the various trials of skill. In solemn procession marched the whole school of gladiators, marshalled by their masters—the torch fires reflected on their polished arms and their brawny giant limbs, fully exposed in the red flickering light to the criticism of the populace. Charioteers drove their racing horses beside them, and a host of boxers, wrestlers, and other combatants, ready equipped for the struggle, brought up the rear. Satyrs jumping and frisking in the burlesque of a martial dance succeeded, and then appeared

a great company of horn-blowers, another mighty band of trumpeters, then the victims destined for the sacrifices, garlanded with flowers and ribbons ; the representatives of the gods in cars of ivory and silver, drawn by lions and elephants, who had been tamed for the purpose ; hundreds of flamens and augurs, and colleges of priests ; the noble and beautiful chorus of youths and maidens who were to sing the *Carmen* ; and last of all the Emperor himself, surrounded by his guards.

The acclamations of the people greeted the moody Emperor and his little son on every side, but he disdained to acknowledge them. Descending from his chariot, with a suspicious glance around, he hastily took his seat on the elevated throne which had been prepared for his reception, and gave the signal for the prelude of the hymn.

“ *Favete linguis !* ” exclaimed the criers,

and a profound silence instantly reigned over all. It seemed as if in one moment the roar of a million voices had ceased, as if so much human life had suddenly been overtaken by the stillness of death. Nothing was heard but the rustling of the leaves or the rippling of the waters, disturbed by the gentle winds, while the moon in her first orbit looked down benignantly on the scene. Suddenly the mystic silence was broken by the softest strains of a single harp ; but soon the melody was echoed from the strings of a thousand, and the sounds swelled and swelled, and smote the Seven Hills, and were exhausted in sighs upon the plains of the Campagna. Then there was a pause, a space for the drawing of a breath, and silence was once more restored. But only for a moment. The key-note of the *Carmen Seculare* was struck, and the sweet, sonorous voices of the youths and maidens

in the chorus rose like incense from the Roman plain. The hymn was a fitting prelude of the great national celebration :—

“ Where fast the yellow Tiber flows,
The ancient sire, Æneas, came ;
Then to the gods triumphant rose
The sacrifice in smoke and flame :
Safe from the burning walls of Troy,
And toils endured by sea and land,
He found at length the wished-for joy
When landed on the Latian strand.

“ Ye gods, whose sov’reign care is Rome,
Her guardians for a thousand years !
Still watch o’er every hearth and home,
Give vict’ry to her glitt’ring spears ;
And may her sons for prowess be
As famous as her ancient men,
That all her deeds of bravery
The world may see performed again !

“ Come, Phœbus, in thy chariot come,
On our proud hills resplendent rise,
And let no fairer sight than Rome
Be ever seen by mortal eyes.

Diana, too, that rul'st the night,
Come with thy bright'ning silv'ry rays ;
So shall Rome's maids with fresh delight
Chant strains to chaste Ilithyia's praise.

“ Ye sisters, too, the fatal three,
Who in your hands the distaff hold,
Weave now a glorious destiny
For Romans, as in days of old.
Lucina, lend thy guardian aid
For increase of the Roman power ;
And Ceres, the fruit-bearing maid,
Bring in thy lap earth's richest dower.

“ Then Roman youths of future days
Shall great Apollo's praises sing,
And priests the smoke of incense raise,
Made sacred to the golden king ;
And soft Diana, too, shall hear
The voices of the virgin choir
Give thanks for gifts in every sphere
To Roman matron, son, and sire.”

The hymn ceased, and the *popæ* brought forward the first victim for sacrifice. The doomed animal was a handsome bull, with a

snow-white hide and gilded horns ; garlands of flowers surrounded his body and hung about his neck, concealing the rope by which he was led. On his arrival before the temporary altar, which had been erected just at the base of the imperial seat, this rope was loosened, and one chance of escape was given him ; but if he availed himself of this opportunity, woe unto Rome !—it was a bad omen. No such intentions, however, seemed to stir the instincts of the noble bull. He remained calmly standing, munching such of his decorations as he could reach, indifferent to the presence of the spectators, unsuspecting of his fate. Oh blessed unconsciousness ! Not until the three highest hairs were plucked from his brow by the imperial hand did he deign to notice the bystanders. These were the first offerings to the fire and the deities, and the slight pain caused by their removal made him

start. A fierce, angry, threatening look stole into his eyes ; but before he could revenge the insult a stunning blow dealt from a small mallet by the hand of the Emperor felled him to the earth, and half-a-dozen knives were thrust into his side. A few minutes later the smoke and flame of the sacred fire were curling over his snow-white hide, licking up the blood which had been scattered over the altar from the golden goblets in which it had been collected.

Standing amid the fragrant mist of the incense, the Emperor dipped his hands in water, raised them towards the heavens, uttered a short prayer, poured out another libation, and resigned his office to the principal of the priests, who had assisted him during the ceremony.

“Alas!” exclaimed a Christian, who had been a witness of these solemnities, “alas and alas! what would the good Origen say

to this profanity? I hear he hath indited many letters to Philip and his Empress of late. To what little purpose has the good seed been scattered!"

The speaker was a young man about thirty years of age, of a great height, and with a fine open countenance. For some time past he had been a vehement declaimer against the idolatry of the age. In vain the calmer Fabian strove to confine his enthusiasm within moderate bounds. No opportunity of hurling a terrible threatening at the Pagans in the midst of their iniquities was ever missed by Balus, and for this purpose he now visited the Campus Martius; but a solemn promise made to Fabian that he would not speak until the Emperor had departed, had hitherto bound his tongue.

"To what little purpose?" echoed a bystander with a sneer, not observing that Balus had already disappeared. "With too

much purpose, I should say. No atheist blood has been spilt since the Arabian was elected to the purple. He gives the miserable sect overmuch licence. No wonder report whispers he is at least half a Nazarene. Now if I had been emperor, I would have made the Tiber flow red with their thin blood, the croaking, self-denying brood!"

"Likely, O Jucundus," replied a plebeian, with a good-natured expression on his broad face. "Thou art too great a devotee of Bacchus to tolerate the poor unassuming followers of Christus. Do they not live moderately and forbid wine?"

"Ay, and all that makes life palatable," piped a dwarfed, humpbacked man. "I am with Jucundus. Down with the Nazarenes I would, without asking an *as*, forge a hundred mallets to crush so many of their heads. They increase like vermin. They would

take all the joy out of living with their preparations for a better world. Ye gods! is not this good enough? What shows, what entertainments for the people, two thousand gladiators fighting at one time in the circus! Who ever heard of such a thing? A libation to Roma: I am satisfied with the pleasures she bestows upon me!"

"What pleasures can you enjoy, little Calvus," asked a woman spitefully, "with your poor tunic, and your poor pay, and your hideous humpback?"

"Who speaks?" cried, or rather screamed the deformed ironsmith, doubling his fist.

But a lictor put him aside. "What would you?" he exclaimed. "Here comes the Emperor." And Philip passed by—moody, frowning, looking neither to the right nor the left.

Scarcely had the last of the imperial procession disappeared before the young

Christian deacon, who had regretted and disapproved the Emperor's conduct, hurried towards the imperial seat, and hastily ascended one of the poles which supported the canopy. This strange behaviour naturally arrested the attention of many who were about to follow the progress of Philip, and they remained to see what would follow. Balus did not keep them long waiting. Clinging to the pole with one arm, while he gesticulated with the other, he began to preach.

“Abominable idolatries!” he shouted, in immediate reference to the rites which had initiated the celebration of the millennium. “We all had our conversation in times past among the Gentiles, when we walked according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the carnal mind. And can it be otherwise, worshippers of drunken Bacchus, votaries of licentious Venus, ye

that offer sacrifices to the sun and moon, and in mystic ceremonies seek to propitiate the powers of nature? It is a shame even to speak of those things which ye do in secret. *Secret*, did I say? It is a shame even to think of those things which ye do in the face of the sun and in the worship of your gods. Abominable idolatries; worship of devils! Your gods are adulterers and thieves, murderers of fathers and devourers of children; and ye that worship them are like unto them. O Rome, Rome, Rome, hear the word of the Lord. Iniquity will be thy ruin. Thou slumberest over a volcano. Ere long it shall break forth and engulf thy bloated inhabitants. Dark clouds are gathering over thy seven hills. The measure of thine iniquity is full. Angels are already hovering over thee with vials full of wrath. Woe shall succeed to woe. Lament and howl for the desolations that

are coming upon thee. In thy pride thou sittest at ease, boasting that thou art a queen, and the mistress of the world. But the enemy is at thy gates. They come from the north and the south, great and terrible warriors. Lo ! signs in the sun and moon, and on the earth distress of nations ! woe to the guilty city ! In one hour her desolation cometh. The cup of the wine of the fierceness of the wrath of God shall be poured out upon this mighty Babylon, for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sin, and that ye receive not of her plagues. In one day shall come death, and mourning, and famine : for it is the Lord God that judgeth her."

"Holloa, raving maniac !" shouted a voice from the crowd, "here again with your plagues. They are long in coming."

The voice that interrupted Balus was one of the company of the Sophists, who treated him as a simple fanatic, and believed as little in the destruction of Rome as they did in anything else. But to Balus, in the young ardour of a new faith, the Apocalyptic images were realities. He saw the destroying angels as vividly as they were seen by John in Patmos. He saw the horses up to the bridles in blood by the walls of the city, and the merchants of the earth, who had been made rich by their commerce with Rome, standing on the summits of the hills and crying, “Alas for the great city !”

The interruption did not disturb the fearless preacher. To the words that the plagues were long in coming, he answered, “God waits. Oh the patience of God ! It is wonderful how God waits. His long-suffering should lead men to repentance. Though the vials of wrath are full, and the

angels are ready to pour them out on the mystical Babylon, yet God tarries. He has no pleasure in executing judgment. But it must come. The plagues must come. The great city shall be trodden in the fierceness of the divine anger, as a man treadeth the winepress."

After this answer to the interruption, the preacher returned with renewed vehemence to his denunciation of the abominable idolatries of the heathen world.

"And," he continued, "to idolatries we have now added apostasies from the faith, for ye have seen the Emperor, after professing himself a Christian and receiving the remission of sins, again sacrificing to the pagan gods."

"Treason! treason!" shouted a host of voices at once.

"It will but hasten thy destruction, O Rome!" continued Balus.

“Down with the Nazarene!” repeated the populace; and a violent rush was made to dislodge the fearless deacon. But at the same instant the chariot of the vestal Maxima appeared, and her lictors proceeded to clear the road.

“Down with the Nazarene!” cried the infuriated people. “Crush him under the chariot wheels of our august vestal.”

“Not so,” replied the Maxima, rising from her seat and tossing her veiled head haughtily. “I desire not to have my chariot polluted with such blood. Let him go! Two or three followers of Christus against tens of thousands who honour the gods! Ye men of Rome, laugh at the unequal match, and disdain to meddle with the poor fanatics. It is a battle between the pygmies and Hercules. Let him go, let him go!”

And a herald repeated her words, and

Balus escaped with a greater faith than ever in the Providence which protected him, and which had never failed him in the time of need.



CHAPTER XIII.

LELA THE DANCER.

IFE was not bright to Lela, though she smiled often. The little harp, which made a joyful accompaniment to her graceful movements, frequently expressed in mournful melodies some of the sad thoughts which passed through her mind. A smile, a blithe answer, a gay dress, are not always evidences of inward happiness. From her earliest childhood Lela had known the bitterness of suffering. She had lost her father, who was a poor freedman, in a street broil. A child of three

years old, she had seen him carried over the threshold of his home, pale and bleeding; and she had never forgotten the dreadful sight. Then came a struggle for existence more terrible than before—a struggle too terrible to think upon without a shudder. Days without bread—days lived through by the help of a morsel supplied by the charity of neighbours almost as poor as Lela's mother, or by the gift of a few crumbs dropped from the tables of the rich. One day the little hungry child saw a girl dancing in the street surrounded by an applauding crowd. They tossed *asses* to her for her performance, and she smiled as though she were happy. Henceforward the quick, imitative Lela was a dancer. She had no teacher but nature, and the melodies which she heard by accident directed her motions. Yet she became an adept. She rose early to exercise the art, and she

retired late ; but the coins fell slowly into her lap.

There was a story about her harp. It belonged to a venerable minstrel who was wont to sit at his door and sing the verses of the ancients. His voice was low and feeble, but the charm of it had not perished with its strength. An audience still collected around him, and rapturous plaudits were not wanting. Often, often did Lela mingle with the crowd to hear those wonderful strains and yet more wonderful words. It was her one pleasure. At last the minstrel noticed her ; he permitted her to touch those magic strings, he heard her echo his songs, while she imitated his movements in dumb show, and he learnt to look for her, to love her. The minstrel was very old, as old as Nestor, and his fingers were stiff. Every day rendered them more nerveless. And presently they could no

longer draw forth the familiar chords. He wept. It was sad to see how the old man bowed his white head over the silent harp and wept. The chords were friends, and they were dead—dead. They would be heard no more.

“Not so,” murmured Lela the consoler. “Be happy, O father! Thou shalt show me the right strings, and I will make them resound in thine ears.”

“Surely the gods speak to me,” said the old man as he lifted himself and guided the little hand. And the hand was cunning,—the harp answered to its touch. The music of the past was heard once again.

One day the old man murmured, “Hear, O Lela! The harp lieth idle in thy absence. Take it with thee.” And she took it. O happy morn when the maiden carried it forth for the first time! Lightly she sped down the street. Again and again she

looked back to see if he were still watching. All through the day his words echoed in her ear, those sweet, inspiring words of encouragement which kept her heart buoyant. The harp attracted an unusual audience, and she hastened home radiant, and rich with *asses*. Panting to tell of her success and her adventures, she reached his abode. She was about to step on the threshold when something caught her foot. She looked down ; she started. It was a cypress bough—a sign of death !

Yes, the old minstrel was dead !

We have not spoken of Lela's mother. Trouble and misfortune had soured the temper of the poor woman, and rendered her uncompanionable and unsympathetic. She was wholly dependent upon the exertions of her daughter. She never rose from her couch, and added to the burden of her helplessness by a thousand querulous complaints.

Lela bore them patiently, and disdained to return an answer; but there were times when she was weary—times when all her efforts had failed to supply the requisite earnings—times when her heart sank before the prospect of the future, and then the mother's murmurs were hard to bear. She would rush out of the house and seek solitude wherever it was to be found.

One evening a young patrician was returning from a late revel at the house of Claudius Bromius. He had chosen to walk, as the air was sultry; and his slaves carried his lectica before him. Onward he sauntered, with a step unusually steady, echoing in a low harmonious voice the songs and the melodies which he had heard at the feast of the Sophist. It was a brilliant moonlight night, and all things were distinctly visible. A circle of sheen crowned every object, and cast into greater density the various

shadows. The white marble columns of the little temple of Claudius shone like silver, and a profound, mysterious silence reigned in its vicinity. Camillus ceased to sing his gay song as he drew near to the sacred building. The words, the melody, sounded inappropriate to the scene ; while, on the contrary, the equal, heavy footsteps of the bearers, and the low, monotonous chant which they uttered at intervals seemed to increase the awe which it inspired.

By one of the pillars leant a female figure. The enshrouding *palla* had fallen from her shoulders, and all the minutiae of her fanciful costume were revealed. Its brilliant hues, however, were softened into sombre tints, and its glittering ornaments shone with a steady light. The statue of the deified Claudius was not more motionless than the figure by the pillar. It was Lela the dancer, absorbed in her melancholy reflections. She

neither saw nor heard the bearers of the lectica, although their footsteps drew forth ringing echoes from the roof of the sacred portico. Camillus ascended the high flight of steps and stood by her side ; yet still she stirred not. The tearful face remained hidden, the mind absent.

“ Maiden,” said Camillus, in his pleasant, musical voice, “ what troubles thee ? and why art thou alone at this late hour ? Is thy lover faithless ? ”

Lela was alarmed by the unexpected address. She started violently, hastily dashed the tears from her eyes, and gazed at the speaker. She was like one just awakened from a dream.

“ I have no lover,” she answered, in a low voice.

“ Men are blind, then,” said the young patrician, laughing, “ for by the gods thou hast a pretty face.”

Lela answered not. She lifted the fallen *palla*, wrapped it with a quick, graceful gesture about her figure, and prepared for an escape. It was later than she supposed, and she was in no mood for the banter of a young and thoughtless patrician returning from his midnight revels.

But Aulus Camillus interpreted the movement, and laid his hand upon her arm.

“Thou art a dancer?” said he.

“I do not deny it,” answered Lela sharply; “nor can I: the fashion of my garments proclaims my profession.”

“Be not angry,” replied Camillus, in soothing accents, “for I ask thee out of kindness and a desire to remove the cause of thy grief. Perhaps the public have not patronized thy performance to-day;” and he drew forth his purse.

But Lela refused the gift.

“It is not always the want of an *as* which

makes a dancer sorrowful," she said proudly.
"I have many troubles."

"And the gods shelter me from every ill wind," said Camillus.

"So unequally is the government of the world administered," remarked Lela.

"But the gods surely destine the rich to lighten the burdens of the poor," said the young patrician.

"If they will," retorted the dancer.

"I will be thy good genius," said Camillus, smiling. "Tell me thy name, O maiden, and the place of thy abode."

But Lela declined. "The purple-edged robe of a patrician must not be seen in the neighbourhood of my home," said she.

"How then can I assist thee?" asked Camillus.

Lela considered. The offer of help was evidently sincere, and she began to think the gods had answered her prayers. "You

have rich friends," she said at length, "and doubtless you have much influence. The poor dancer would prefer to exercise her art in the houses of the patricians rather than at the corners of the streets."

"Be it so," replied Camillus heartily. "But if thou wilt not tell me thy name and thy abode, how shall I find thee?"

"I will be here at the eleventh hour to-morrow," answered Lela; and without another word she suddenly turned and fled.

From that day Lela danced in the houses of the patricians, and the superiority of her performances soon made her a favourite with her patrons.

One evening Lela rested for a few moments on the topmost step of the Thermae Antoninianæ.

Who can control the thoughts? Let us banish them with a mighty effort, yet they return,—pleasant thoughts and sad thoughts

haunting the mind alternately, and making memory ring changes whence come smiles or tears.

The poor dancer thought of Aulus Camillus. Since the death of the old minstrel he had been the first to whisper words of consolation in her ear, and he had given her his hand in a time of need. At first she had thought of him as a benefactor, but imagination soon endowed him with the qualities of a god. O dangerous sympathy ! thou hast become the parent of a warmer emotion. An image was set up in the heart of the simple Lela which she must worship in vain. The young patrician did not dream of the dancing maiden's love, and he daily added fuel to the flame by pleasant words and smiles, and an anxiety to forward her interests on all occasions.

Lela sat on the steps of the Thermæ Antoninianæ and heaved a sigh. She knew

how much the thoughtless compliments which quickened her pulse were worth. They came to her like the rays of the sun, and fell, like them, with equal brightness upon all. “Alas!” she murmured, “I adore a shadow. The gods preserve me from the fate of beautiful Narcissus!”

It was at this moment that the voice of Plotinus addressing his disciples reached her ear.

“Man,” said he, “is the victim of his passions. He is like a ship dashed to and fro upon tumultuous seas. To govern himself he must hold the rudder with a steady hand, and bring all his strength to the effort, determined to obtain the mastery. The soul carnalized by the body is weak and fluctuating. To get the victory it must make a continual struggle. Once decided, every act of perseverance is an increase of strength, and the longer it strives the easier the effort

becomes ; but to doubt or vacillate is to resign the battle.”

Lela heard the words with amazement. A divine voice seemed to be addressing her. She arose, determined to conquer the passion which was destroying her peace of mind ; and henceforward she failed not to attend the lectures of Plotinus whenever she had an opportunity. He was her guiding star, her teacher, her saviour.

Just before sunset on the day succeeding the singing of the propitiatory hymn, a great number of persons were assembled in the neighbourhood of the Baths of Antoninus. They awaited the coming of Plotinus. Many of them were strangers, who knew the philosopher only by repute ; but the greater part of the multitude were those who regularly listened to his words, but did not practise what he said. So fascinating was his oratory that they had left the brilliant scenes and

entertainments in the Circus to hear him speak—yea, though they knew by experience that their gay garments and glittering jewels would draw forth the keenest satire and the sharpest rebukes.

Amongst them sat Lela, pensively leaning upon her harp.

“Lela,” said a voice at her side.

The girl turned sharply, and a deep flush overspread her countenance as she recognised Aulus Camillus.

“Lela,” said the young patrician, “will you carry a message for me—a message that I can send only by one whom I can trust ?”

“I am always at the service of my lord,” answered Lela.

“Come aside, then, out of the crowd,” said Camillus ; and he led the dancer into one of the quiet passages of the Thermae.

“You saw,” said he, drawing out his tablets, “the Hebe of the procession last

night, the beautiful Greek ward of Plotinus, who sat by Valaria, the widow, in the Circus?"

"I saw her," replied Lela, thankful that the dim light in the unfrequented passage cast a shadow over her face; "I saw her; she was indeed fair."

"Too fair for my peace of mind," murmured Camillus. "Lela, that face haunts me as no face hath done before. The Fates have shown me my bride."

The dancer turned pale, and pressed her harp convulsively to her breast. She fancied she could hear her heart beating, and she feared that the sound would become audible to her companion.

Camillus examined the point of his stylus, and inscribed letters on his tablets.

"Beautiful Hebe," he wrote, "Aulus Camillus the patrician worships thee. Smile upon thy slave, for thine altar is fixed in his

heart, and he will henceforth offer incense upon no other shrine."

Then he drew a spray of myrtle blossom from its fastening in his tunic, and gave it to Lela with the tablets. "You will not fail to deliver these trifles, O little confidante?" he said, with his most winning smile.

"I will not fail," answered the dancer, in trembling tones.

Camillus started. "Are you ill, pretty Lela?" he asked, anxiously.

"No," replied Lela, forcing a smile. "Only weary—only heartsick. But thou knowest, O kind patron, that that is no strange emotion to the poor dancer."

"Ay," said Camillus, with ready sympathy, "I would it were; I am sorry for thee, Lela."

Lela dashed the tears from her eyes, and began to sing a merry song:—

"Said the Sun to the Shade,
I am king of the glade,—
Away, away, away!"

But it only withdrew
Where the thicker wood grew,
Out of his golden way.

O patient Shade, abide
Return of eventide ;
The boasting Sun must sleep,
And then shall shadows creep.

“ Said Grief to Joy, Depart,
I am king of the heart,—
Away, away, away !
And Joy gave place to Grief :
Her reign was only brief,—
A day, a day, a day !
Sun and Shade, Sun and Shade,
Rule alternately over the glade ;
Smiles and tears, smiles and tears,
Each other succeed in the changing years.”

Then she fled to the extremity of the passage with the rapidity of a whirlwind, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WORD IN SEASON.

AS soon as the sacrifices were over Laberius cast aside his sacerdotal garments and retired to his favourite grove,—a little ambush of myrtles surrounding a grotto dedicated to Apollo in the neighbourhood of the temple to which he belonged.

The young priest had avoided seeing Plotinus since the day on which he was persuaded to hear him discourse on virtue; but the words which the philosopher had spoken continued to haunt him. They had opened the floodgates of memory, and he

became a melancholy youth brooding over the unsatisfactoriness of life. The burden temporarily removed from his mind was now apparently doubled in weight. It crushed him to the earth ; it filled his eyes with tears ; it plunged him into unfathomable despair. The fair world was no longer fair. The mask was removed, and the hollowness of its attractions revealed. Laberius wondered, as he hurried into the most secret part of the grove, how he could have been deceived by the glitter of Bromius, and yet he cursed the philosopher who had opened his eyes to his folly. What should he do ? Pleasure no longer fascinated him by promising a draught of Lethe, and he had no inclination to enter into the profound reveries of Plotinus. He must stand still—and to do *that* was madness. He flung himself violently upon the earth under the myrtle trees, and tore up the grass and

scattered the flowers abroad in his agony, like one bereft of his senses. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "that my life were a mere existence resembling that of the herbs which I destroy! Would that I could feel assured of finding with them a certain end in death!" Suddenly he arose, smoothed his disordered garments, and strove to calm himself. He was a man, and it behoved him to demean himself like a man. Why should he grovel upon the earth and weep because he lived and knew not why he lived? There must be some reason for his birth. Surely man, the highest, the most intellectual of all beings upon earth, to whose support and entertainment all life contributed, was not alone formed for nought. There must be some greater reason for his existence than the enjoyment of sense. If he could only discover it he would probably find the tranquillity and content which he had lost, or

at least learn resignation. He paced to and fro under the myrtle trees, and considered the reasons which Plotinus had given for the existence of man.

Laberius did not believe that the impression which the philosopher had made upon his mind was very deep. He felt confident that he could erase it if he deliberately determined to do so, just as some of us think we can silence the voice of conscience. And yet since he had heard Plotinus he seemed to be walking in a dream. He had cried out again and again, "I shall awake presently;" but he had not awakened. Mechanically he had performed the duties of his sacred office, and the while he had been haunted with a disagreeable sense of their emptiness.

Plotinus had startled the young priest. Laberius, standing on the edge of a precipice, about to take the last fatal step, had been

suddenly drawn back from the threatened danger. But he was not yet saved. Bewildered with his unexpected deliverance, he still lingered in the perilous vicinity.

And memory echoed the many warnings which had sounded in his ear. He remembered how Paulinus the physician had often entreated him to check his wild career—to pause before it was too late ; how often his sisters had striven to open his eyes to his follies — to persuade him by his father's shade, by the sweet memory of their mother, by the sanctity of his office, to begin a new life. He recalled his sneers at their arguments, his indifference to their tears, his contempt of the reward which they declared was offered to those who avoided excesses, and strove to walk uprightly. But the arguments of Plotinus for the supremacy of reason over the passions had fallen upon him with an overpowering weight. He could

not refute them. He could no longer sit in the seat of the scornful. The finger which he had pointed at others he now directed at himself. How contemptible Plotinus had made him appear in his own eyes!

What more dignity than a beast of the field had the man who lived only for the indulgence of his corporeal pleasures? He must even be ranked lower than the beasts; for they violated not the laws of nature, but preserved the divine harmony of the universe.

“Plotinus may be a fanatic,” he cried, “but he is a noble fanatic. He strives to elevate man. He would make us believe ourselves gods, that he may persuade us to live like gods.”

As he spoke, Laberius drew near to the cluster of myrtle trees which formed the entrance to the grotto of Apollo. The seclusion of its situation offered him a retreat sufficiently distant from the revels which

were to follow the celebration of the sacrifices, and a secure hiding-place from any friends who might seek his company. Never had his favourite retreat appeared more inviting. The interior of the grotto was almost dark, the silence was profound. The moon-shine hallowed all its adornments, and glorified the noble statue of the god which stood just within the opening.

Laberius seated himself on a stone half overgrown with moss, and contrasted the quiet which prevailed with the tumult which had so lately surrounded him. Since his first visit to the house of Claudius Bromius he had not once entered this place.

The change from uninterrupted excitement to intense stillness was like the spray of a fountain flung upon his heated brow. The sudden refreshment transported him into Elysium. For one moment he forgot the subjects which troubled his mind ; he felt

only the sense of a complete, thrilling enjoyment—of a perfect relief. Alas that it was so limited! The woof of thought, not yet woven out, soon began to make itself perceptible once more. Again the dark spirit predominated ; again Laberius bowed his head, and covered his face with his hands, and was disposed to weep bitter tears ; for was he not like unto one who stood on a road where several ways met, with none to show him the direction in which he should proceed ?

Suddenly he discovered, or rather felt, that he was not alone. He rose, and gazed around with a searching glance. In the darkest corner of the grotto something stirred—sighed. Laberius was startled ; he was alarmed at the idea of having had a witness to his prostration, and perhaps a listener to his soliloquies. He moved towards the object and touched it.

"Speak," he said. "Who art thou that seekest seclusion on such a day?"

A female figure slowly lifted itself from a crouching position and stood before him.

"Lela!" exclaimed Laberius, recognising the dancer despite the uncertain light.

"It is I," said Lela, coming forward; and Laberius saw that she had been weeping violently. Her eyes were red and swollen, her lips still trembled with the emotion which disturbed her breast. With loosened hair, with disordered dress, she stood before Laberius, striving to conceal the traces of her grief.

"A dancing girl in tears!" exclaimed Laberius. "Ye gods! is not that a thing unheard of? What has happened, pretty Lela, to affright thy smiles? Have you broken your harp, or lamed your foot? Both accidents were terrible misfortunes on such a day as this, for doubtless you would dance your best in honour of Roma."

"My heart is broken," sobbed Lela, unable to control herself any longer.

"Is it possible?" said Laberius, still in a bantering tone. "What lover hath ill-used thee, O little one?"

Lela put up her hands in a beseeching attitude. "O priest of Jupiter!" cried she, "do not speak to me so lightly,—my grief is real, real as thine!" she murmured. "I saw thee but now with thy head bowed upon thy hands."

"It was a phantasy, Lela, an imagination that disturbed me," answered Laberius, suddenly serious. "Forget that you have seen me troubled, and tell me the cause of your tears?"

"See here," said Lela, showing the tablets which Camillus had given her a few hours before. "I am commanded to deliver these, but I do not desire to obey. Ye gods! when I accepted the commission I little

thought it would be so difficult to fulfil.
Help me, O priest of Jupiter,—can I break my
promise, and yet keep a quiet conscience?"

She looked at him earnestly with sad, in-
quiring eyes.

"Plotinus would say that a promise was
binding," said Laberius thoughtfully; "but
Claudius Bromius promises, and performs as
suits him best."

"Who would follow Claudius Bromius?"
exclaimed Lela contemptuously.

Laberius winced, but he said, "Surely it
is wiser than following Plotinus?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Lela. "Plotinus is
a god; I could pour out libations unto him.
Mercury cannot be more eloquent, Fidius
Dius more sincere. The portico of the
Thermæ has become a shrine unto the poor
dancer since he spoke therein. I go thither
whenever I can to hear his wonderful words;
and though I have to stand when my feet

are weary with dancing, I heed not the fatigue. The sound of his voice soothes me, and takes away the remembrance of all my troubles. Oh that I could comprehend that which he would teach us! Happy, happy Laberius, to be the ward of such a man! Thou wilt understand him, and his deity will respect thee, will reveal himself unto thee as he doth unto the philosopher."

Laberius shook his head. "Would it were possible!" he murmured; "but I have little hope; I am like a man groping in the dark."

"I know," said Lela; "but the light is before, and it will appear suddenly and unexpectedly, as thou hast appeared unto me. Oh, Laberius, my tears are dried since thou camest, for I will abide by thy advice. It will injure another if I do not carry these tablets, and myself if I carry them; what shall I do? what shall I do? The gods make thee an oracle unto me, for I

cannot decide for myself. What shall I do?" she repeated piteously.

"Plotinus would recommend thee to offend thyself," murmured Laberius.

"Then I will carry my message," cried the poor Lela desperately,—"yea, though I die in the act."

"But," added Laberius, as though speaking to himself, "Bromius would laugh that idea to scorn."

"Talk not of Bromius," exclaimed Lela. "*It is nobler to be an humble disciple of Plotinus than the bosom friend of the great Sophist.* Vale, Laberius; I feel that thou hast spoken with the tongue of the philosopher—that thou hast echoed the voice of my heart."

She caught up the *palla* which had dropped from her shoulders. She wrapped it around her trembling form, and disappeared in the shadow of the myrtle trees. Poor Lela! she was afraid to linger, lest she should waver

in her decision. Away, away, away she sped ; she would give herself no time for thought until her mission was fulfilled, and then ?—

Laberius remained motionless. Had the gods arranged this strange and apparently accidental meeting with Lela in order to direct him in his indecision ?

He repeated her words softly, thoughtfully : “ It is nobler to be an humble disciple of Plotinus than the bosom friend of the great Sophist.”

CHAPTER XV.

ACATIA'S DREAM.

“ UNTILIA,” said Acatia, the morning after Iope had departed, “we must follow our cousin to Rome.”

“Impossible,” replied Quintilia quietly. “You could not endure the fatigues of the journey, O my sister.”

“The gods will give me strength to carry out their commands,” answered Acatia. “They have ordered me in a dream to do this thing.”

Quintilia ceased to turn the smooth spindle with her thumb. “What was the dream?” she asked, folding her hands upon

her lap and leaning towards her sister in an attitude of attention ; for, although she strove not to think it, Acatia's dreams were unto her as the voice of an oracle.

Acatia reclined wearily on her cushions. "I dreamt," said she, in a low, musical voice, with a singularly mysterious accent—"I dreamt that I sat under the colonnade and wreathed garlands in honour of Roma, and thou didst bring me the flowers of which they were made—the fairest flowers in the garden."

Here the speaker paused, moved uneasily, and seemed to gaze at some invisible object at the extremity of the apartment. Then she smiled, and continued : "I see thee now, Quintilia, as I saw thee then : thou wert thy very self, and didst come forward like a Juno, with thy tunic full of flowers, and a countenance full of thought. Twice thou camest to me, and twice

thou laidst thy beautiful burden in my lap. Then I said, ‘It would be pleasant to hang these garlands on the altar which our brother Laberius serves.’ But thou didst shake thy head and say, ‘It is better to make an offering in a secret place. I love not publicity and ceremony. There is more worship, methinks, where there is less parade. I wish that there were no images of our gods, and I will make only a garland for the deity of Plotinus, who hath no image.’ At which I was grieved, for I thought the gods would all be angry with thee, O Quintilia, and I wept bitterly, and made two garlands for every deity that is known, and poured out libations, crying, ‘Be appeased, O ye gods! I make an offering for my sister and myself.’ Then the firmament was suddenly opened, and a great shower of flowers fell; and I saw a rainbow, and from under the rainbow came a voice, saying,

'Thou shalt hang thy garlands on the altars in Rome. Arise, and be gone unto Rome.' But I sighed, and answered, 'How can I do this thing? for I am weak: my strength is not sufficient for the fatigue, and therefore I should fall by the way.' To which the voice replied, in a tone of terrible authority, 'Go into Rome!' and at the same moment I saw the city lying at my feet. I stood, as it were, upon a great hill, and looked down upon its temples and palaces, its habitations, its forums and its gates. I saw the busy multitudes in the streets, I saw them moving hither and thither, and I was conscious of their occupations. Every object was marvellously visible, O Quintilia, and I stood gazing at the spectacle in amazement, sensible that it was all a phantom, yet deeply interested. I stood, I know not how long—years it seemed—until I was startled by a scream of terror uttered in a familiar

voice. With fear-struck heart, with trembling limbs, I turned and saw Iope—Iope with a sad countenance, and the tears streaming from her eyes. ‘Acatia! Acatia!’ she cried, ‘come to Rome, Acatia, for I have need of thee.’ Upon which there fell a shield from above, and I took up the shield and went hurriedly towards her, and she crept under it and close to my side as if for protection. Then I awoke.”

“Thou hast been thinking too much of Iope’s departure,” said Quintilia; but the expression of her face was grave. “The vision is certainly singular,” she added; “but no doubt the impression will wear away.”

“I think not,” answered Acatia simply; and it was so. All through the day the memory of the dream abode in the maiden’s mind, and towards sunset she became excited and feverish. Neither the harp of Quintilia nor the soothing voice of Nurse

Suppedia, nor the song of her favourite bird, could bring her rest. She strove to conceal her emotions, she endeavoured to lie quietly upon her couch, but the brilliant eyes, the trembling lips, the agitated fingers, revealed the effort.

Quintilia moved about her sister like a shadow, and talked of many things and adopted many arts to banish the remembrance of the dream ; but it lingered, it continued to disturb and to weaken its victim.

Night came and passed away, and still it was there—a terrible nightmare haunting the weary brain and driving away sleep,—a shadow crossing the sunbeams and darkening all that was pleasant and bright in life.

Acatia sank beneath the burden, and Quintilia became alarmed. “Must it be ?” she murmured at last ; “must we go to Rome, O my sister ?”

And Acatia answered, “I die if we do not.”

Then Quintilia went away, silently and full of grief, to make preparations for the journey, and Acatia heard her giving orders to the maidens, and listened to their movements, and was soothed by the expectation of having her wishes gratified.

Thus it chanced that four days after the departure of Iope—on the first day of the games—the sisters with the nurse Suppedia arrived at the house of Paulinus in the Via Sacra.

The good physician welcomed them and chided them in the same breath.

“Will you see our fine performances after all?” he exclaimed. “The gods know I am glad to give you house-room, but oh what thoughtless children to take such a journey at this saturnalian season! The scenery of Laurentum is more beautiful than all our exhibitions. You leave a substance for a shadow, and will find yourselves sorely dis-

appointed in the end. Quintilia, my stately favourite, have you no more wisdom in your head? Hast thou forgotten the delicacy of thy nursling? Take her swiftly to her chamber—the best thou canst find in the house,—and I will bring you both a cordial, for indeed I am well pleased to see you in Rome once more."

Meanwhile a messenger was sent to acquaint Plotinus with their arrival, and the surprised philosopher instantly returned the papyrus he was studying to its envelope, folded his toga over his breast, and went to visit them.

Fatigued by her journey, Acatia reposed upon a cedar-wood couch which had been hastily prepared for her reception in a corner of the apartment, where it was screened from the wandering draughts by a hanging of rich tapestry.

Two female slaves stood by her side. The

one loosened her braided hair, and the other was busily engaged in unfastening the white thongs of her shoes. Her cheeks were fevered by the unusual excitement which she had undergone, but otherwise she suffered nothing. Lost in a sweet reverie over her late journey, and more certainly assured by its successful accomplishment that it was a divine command, she lay at ease. With her hands folded upon her bosom, her fair countenance illumined by the sunlight, she watched the movements of Quintilia as she silently glided hither and thither, thoughtfully doing what she could to ensure the comfort of her sister.

The curtain was lifted softly by a long-fingered hand, and Plotinus the philosopher stepped into the room and into the light of the sunbeam which slanted over Acatia. “What meaneth this adventure, O my children?” he inquired gravely.

"Revered guardian," replied Acatia, turning towards him with a smile, "reprove us not, for we have only obeyed the voice of the gods."

Plotinus sat down and looked at Quintilia for an explanation.

"It was a dream," said Quintilia, standing erect before Plotinus, and speaking slowly. "The disturbed brain produced a picture, and the impression would not wear away." Then she described the vision of Acatia as if she herself had seen it. So accurately did she repeat the words of her sister, so strangely did she echo the very tones of her voice, that the listening Acatia was astonished and troubled. She was as though she had dreamt the dream again.

And Plotinus, paying attention with his chin resting upon the palms of his hands, and his elbows supported by his knees, was also moved to betray emotion.

"What say you, O wise philosopher?" asked Quintilia when she had ended her relation. "Spake the gods to us in this vivid dream?"

"The gods," said Plotinus, "love the pure in heart. Acatia has subdued the flesh to the spirit, and by this subjugation of the material she has become allied to the divine. It is only the fine eye of genius that discerns the harmonies of creation. There are symphonies in nature known only to those gifted with an unusual sense of hearing. Even so there are mysteries in the midst of which we all live daily, but they are unveiled only to the souls that are purified and raised to the divine. When the spirit that is in man rises above the clay tenement—abstracts itself, so to speak, from its surroundings, and retires into its own depths, there, alone with its true self, its eyes are opened to see what is invisible to

souls still steeped in the sensuous, and who have not yet burst the bonds of the material ; to these emancipated souls the gods speak, sometimes in moments of contemplation, in solitary wanderings, in secret places, and sometimes in dreams and visions of the night. There is no need, Quintilia, to fear the gods ; they are only terrible to those who do evil. Sin casts back on the soul its dark shadows, perverting the vision, and transforming eternal beauties into apparent deformities. Men ascribe to the gods their own passions. They make the celestials like the gods of Tartarus, as if they delighted in sending souls to the Stygian shades, there to screech and howl as they sink deeper and deeper into the gulf of infinite misery. Their own imagination creates the picture. They tremble in the divine presence, and seek to bribe the gods that they may escape the suffering which is due to

their sins. But to the purified the gods are all goodness. The pure in heart are raised to communion with the celestials, watched over by them, instructed how to pass their lives on earth, and led by them into higher revelations of the mysteries that relate to the one, the unknowable God, who pervades all being and yet all being transcends."

The discourse of Plotinus was here interrupted by the entrance of Valaria and Iope, who had heard from Paulinus of the arrival of the sisters, and had instantly left the Circus to greet them.

"Who would have believed in the performance of such a miracle?" exclaimed Valaria. "O goddess Roma, thou art indeed a very enchantress! If Janiculum had fallen into the Tiber I could not have been more surprised."

Acatia started from her couch, her tresses dishevelled and her feet bare.

"My Iope!" she cried.

Quintilia laid a gentle but restraining hand upon the shoulder of her sister. "Thou art weary, O sweet one," she said; "Iope comes to thee."

The young Greek encircled Acatia with her arms, and nestled by her side, in the attitude of the phantomed Iope which Acatia had seen in her dream.

The face of Acatia became pale. She smoothed the soft hair which flowed under her hand and sighed.

"I will protect thee," she murmured.
"Yes, I *will* protect thee."

The attention of Quintilia was given to Valaria, with whom she talked of the journey, and saw not the emotion of her sister. Plotinus alone heard the whisper.

He bent forward. "The gods help thee!" said he, in a voice almost inaudible; "thou art weak, but it was a ridiculous mouse which helped the lion out of the net."

He rose as he spoke, and left the chamber with a noiseless footstep, a thoughtful brow, for a thousand people awaited his advent by the Thermæ.

And the sunbeam, which shone on the spot where the philosopher had sat, faded away, and a beautiful gray shadow stole into its place, and Acatia reposed with her hands folded upon her bosom, her eyes closed like a sleeping saint, listening to the prattle of Iope. What mattered the words? It was their sweet, murmuring sound—their melody, which pleased the ear and soothed the weary maiden.

Meanwhile Quintilia and Valaria had removed into the peristylum, where a light refreshment of fruits and cakes was being prepared.

The widow, full of excitement and anticipation, began again to talk volubly of the entertainments in the Circus, but Quintilia heard

her not. Her thoughts were above, borne thither by the words of Plotinus. She gazed through the aperture in the roof at the sinking sun, the passing red clouds, and the reflection of their brightness was upon her face and upon the folds of her white robe. She saw in the glowing firmament the garment of God, and understood how gloriously He illuminated all those who drew near unto Him.

"I must call Iope," cried Valaria at last. "The moon is already arisen, and it grows late. Torches will be burning in the Circus, and the Empress will take notice of our absence."

Quintilia was aroused from her reverie.

"Let the child abide with Acatia," she pleaded.

Valaria shook her head. "That cannot be," she answered. "The star of the day must not set so soon. I tell thee, O Quintilia,

our little Greek is the reigning beauty. There was not a fairer maiden in the procession or in the Circus. A golden prospect lies before her."

Quintilia sighed. That same instant a curtain was lifted, and a muffled voice inquired for the Lady Iope.

"What would you?" asked Valaria, gazing at the veiled female figure which appeared.

"A message," replied the stranger, holding up a spray of myrtle and a set of ivory tablets.

"Deliver it, then," said the widow, laughing; and she began to give instructions for the finding of the chamber where Acatia and Iope were.

But Quintilia interposed.

"Valaria," she said gravely, "it would be better not," and her face was very pale.

"Yes, it would be better not," echoed the

muffled figure in an inaudible voice ; but she fled as she spoke in the direction indicated by the widow.

In another minute the tablets and the spray of myrtle were lying in the lap of Iope, and the bearer had disappeared with a low moan of pain.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLOTINUS ON LOVE.

N hour later Paulinus the physician placed the tablets in the hands of Plotinus.

“Here is an arrow,” said he, “which the mischievous God Eros hath aimed at one of your wards, but the wound is not yet too deep for healing. What say you, O my friend?”

“Alas, poor souls!” exclaimed Plotinus. “They are sunk deep into the Hades of corruption, death, and darkness. The divine Plato called sense the cavern or den into which the soul had fallen after existing in the bright ethereal regions, and in this den

its chief delights are in the indulgence of the passions. Ah, poor Iope! her body lives, but her soul is dead. She knows of nothing but the vanities of this mundane existence."

"Philosopher," said the physician, "can you thus speak of lovers' joys? The gods have given to man no gift that can be compared with youthful love. Nothing that poets or philosophers feign of heaven can surpass its delights. In truth, Plotinus, if your angels and ethereal beings have no such delights, I shall like their society in heaven as little as I like it here. Talk of ecstasies and transports; why, man, all the dancings of the soul in the infinities and the eternities are mere moonshine beside the raptures of the lover in the presence of the object loved."

"You are not in earnest, physician," said the philosopher. "You know in your own

heart that the love of one sex for the other is but an earthly passion, and its joys a deception, a mere phantasmagorian glimmer in the dark den in which the soul is imprisoned. The delights are only in the imagination. The lover sees beauties that do not exist, and supposes excellences where there are none. It is a true allegory of the poets which represents Cupid as blind. He sees neither deformities nor defects, and he imagines something pure and divine in the raptures of love. Could the passion last, men say it would be heaven itself: but it does not last. To be transient is its very nature; it is a shadow, a flicker, a gleam, bright for a moment, and then shrouded in night. And is it complete even for that moment? Did love, such as you admire, ever exist without jealousy, and does not jealousy burn like a fire consuming the bones? Love, physician, is but a fever

t tormenting the soul as a fever torments the body."

"But, my dear philosopher," answered the physician, "we must look at the world as it is. Your ethereal philosophy is beautiful for retiring souls that live in grottos or wander in Arcadian groves, but here we have to deal with a world of flesh and blood, that needs meat and physic, that marries and is given in marriage. I know it is very hard for sublime people to come down out of the air to look at this world as it is, and to open their eyes to the facts of human life."

"They are facts," said Plotinus, "but things as they are should not be taken for things as they ought to be. The soul of man was destined for a nobler existence. Its aspirations are beyond this earth. Visions of a former blessedness still haunt it, and it is not without hopes of restoration. Some, it is true, seem to have sunk to a

depth in which all memory of pre-existence is lost in darkness and oblivion. Awful indeed is the degradation to which a soul may come. The facts of its depravity may be facts, and they may be called natural in the sense that all acquired habits, tastes, and affections are natural ; but if we look at man as he existed in the divine idea, man as he was before his descent into the Hades of matter, they are not natural, they belong not to man's original nature. This world is the dunghill of the universe. Here the soul of man, cast out from the ethereal, wallows in the mire, and is given over to vile affections. His mundane existence is merely sensual. He lives to feed himself, to get clothing, to build a house to shelter him from the weather. His pleasures are merely animal—he lives for himself. What joy can it be to any pure mind to see the ways of man in this sensual life ? The love of the

sexes is but a deception of the soul brought on by the domination of matter."

The physician was prepared for all this, for he had heard it before. He was quite as conscious of the actual degradation of man as the philosopher could be ; he saw the rottenness of society at one of the worst eras of Roman life, but he looked at it with the practical eye of a man of the world. Sometimes he laughed at it, sometimes swore at it, and at other times excused it. "After all," he would often say, "it is only natural, it is the way of the world, and the world must be as the gods—if there are any gods—meant it to be." He was at first disposed to deny that the affections were vile, but he felt unable to sustain the argument against the facts which were before his mind. He had a dim sense of something divine, even in matter, but he could not say anything definitely on the subject.

He returned at once to the question in the concrete : Camillus loved Iope, and would Plotinus, as her guardian, encourage the business ?

“ Philosopher,” said Paulinus, “ we come back to this. We are in a world that marries, and is given in marriage. Say what you will against the material and against human life, it is still true that there are many beautiful things within the regions of matter. You call this world a dunghill, but that which is now an unsightly worm may yet bask in the sunshine, and be to the philosopher the emblem of the soul set free from sensuous bonds. Perhaps the gods work upwards, and, by material and apparently repulsive agencies, reach a divine purpose. From the affections which some call vile, spring many scenes of domestic joy, self-sacrifice, and greatness of soul. Whatever schemes philosophers may propose for the regeneration of

the world, they must suffer the loves of lovers still to remain."

Plotinus had personal objections to Camillus. He was a Sophist,—which meant that he defended the life in fashion as the proper life for man; making man nothing more than a higher beast,—one that lives more luxuriously, feasts his senses more richly, and by his greater development of reason, is able to have more of the sensuous satisfactions of life. As to Iope, if she would marry, she must be left to her own wishes: where we cannot help, we may still pity.

CHAPTER XVII.

COMING TO THE LIGHT.

THE name of Aulus Camillus had long been familiar to the daughters of Quintilius. Next to that of Claudius Bromius, it was to them the representative of recklessness, extravagance, and immorality. The report of the handsome young patrician's courage, amiability, and generosity weighed nothing in their opinion against this reputation. In him they only saw one who would lead Iope into the dangerous maze of pleasure, surrounding her with temptations, burdening her spirit, and hindering its progress towards the Divine.

"It must not be," said Quintilia gravely, when Paulinus announced to her the decision of Plotinus on the subject of the tablets. "The Supreme Deity is surely able to withhold the hand of Fate if we beseech Him so to do. I shall pour out a libation to the Ineffable One before I retire."

She lifted a golden cup enriched with precious stones from a small silver tripod, and filled it with Falernian.

"I knew not that I had an image of that God in my house," said Paulinus, smiling, as he watched with an expression of admiration the graceful curve of the white arm which upheld the ewer whence the red wine flowed.

"There is no image," replied Quintilia. "There cannot be one, nor is there need of one. The God whom Plotinus teaches us to worship is nowhere, and yet He is in all things."

She stepped near to the verge of the fountain as she uttered in low, earnest tones the prescribed formula of invocation, and poured out the wine over a spot in the pavement where it would easily find a channel into the water.

Then she took up her lamp, and bade Paulinus good night.

“It must not be,” thought Acatia, as she turned her face from the lamp which her sister carried, and pretended to sleep, to spare her the uneasiness of knowing that she was restless.

Quintilia stood for a moment by the couch and gazed down at the reclining figure. Acatia, prostrate and silent, was always a solemn sight to the eyes of Quintilia. She thought of the day when her sister would so repose, but without that quiet respiration which promised another awakening, and imagination made her suffer with the acute

pain of reality. Sighing softly, she brushed away the tears which started into her eyes, and trimmed the flickering flame of the swinging lamp. Plotinus had often spoken of a return to the bosom of the great Deity, and she strove to find consolation in the thought of their reunion therein.

"I feared she would be too fatigued and troubled to sleep," murmured Quintilia as she moved with a noiseless footstep towards the adjoining apartment. "I thank thee, O Morpheus, gentlest of the gods, for this gift."

Then the tapestry which separated the two rooms fell quietly into its place, and in a few moments there was a cessation of the slight sounds which Acatia heard in the apartment of Quintilia. All was still. There was no movement save that of the little flickering flame of the silver lamp which hung from the ceiling behind the drapery of Acatia's couch. And Quintilia

slept ; but Acatia, for whom she would have forfeited her own rest, slept not.

Scarcely had the guardian sister departed before the quivering eyelids were uplifted, and the nervous fingers began to move uneasily beneath the bordered coverlid. The tired, restless maiden gazed around her dimly lighted chamber, and mentally traced the outline of every shadow. Then she prayed, “O beneficent god of sleep, overshadow me with thy wings, for I am weary.” But imagination wrestled with sleep, and was not to be overcome. So vivid were the scenes it reproduced, so real the voices which it echoed, that at length Acatia gave the rein to its vagaries, and it led her again through all the days which had passed since Iope’s departure from Laurentum. Once more she regretted the absence of the young Greek, and feared for her innumerable temptations in the great city. Once more she was dis-

turbed by the remembrance of the dream which had driven her forth from the quiet and comfort of their beautiful country villa into the turmoil of rejoicing Rome. She retraced every step of the journey, and the very landscape was represented before the weary eye of her mind ; and not the landscape only, but the thoughts it had inspired. It was strange how they all came back in a confused procession, and danced and whirled and multiplied until the poor head throbbed, and a deep red spot was burning on each white cheek. Then came the repetition of their reception—the echo of the good physician's gentle rebuke, and of that solemn conversation with Plotinus. Again Acatia saw the philosopher sitting in the sunbeam, with his back towards the sun—sitting in a light which appeared to be directly proceeding from the throne of God.

“ And shall the Source of light be ever

hidden from us?" she thought; "shall the reflection only be before us? O All-divine, reveal Thyself unto him who seeks Thee so earnestly, and unto me who am called so soon to pass over the dark river. I tremble when I think of the regions of darkness beyond, and yet I feel that Thou canst take away my fear, if so Thou wilt."

Acatia, who was seeking after God, believed that her fear of death could be removed, and suddenly it appeared to her as if her prayer was answered. An ineffably brilliant light, like a flash of lightning, shone near her bed. She thought that God was in the light, but she was afraid to look upon Him, and hid her face. Then the voice of Plotinus sounded in her ear, and she saw the philosopher standing by her side, with his face covered and his hands stretched forth.

"I may not look upon the light myself,"

he said sadly ; “ but I feel it, I know where it shines, and I can guide thee thither. Trust thyself to me.”

And she trusted herself. She accepted his help, and he led her forward, her heart panting fast with anticipation and her courage returning ; but, alas ! as they drew closer to the light, at the moment when they seemed to be about to step into its effulgence it became eclipsed by a shadow—the shadow of Iope with those tablets.

The advent of a suitor for Iope had startled Acatia. She had regarded Iope as a child, and not as a maiden who might have a lover. When she had feared for her the fascinations of pleasure she had not counted Eros among the tempters ; but the blush with which Iope had read the words of Aulus Camillus had opened her eyes. The child had become a woman. The words of Camillus had made an impression which she could not

efface. A stone had at last been thrown into the hidden pool, and its quiet surface was disturbed. To what extent would the circle formed by the fall enlarge? Would it fade, or would it increase until it broke even upon the bank? Acatia stood as it were on the brink of the pool, wondering and waiting, hoping against hope to see the face of the water restored to its usual serenity,—to see once again the objects which surrounded it, and the sunshine reflected as before.

But, alas and alas! Acatia could not but feel that she hoped in vain. Who could withstand the fascinations of Aulus Camillus, the rich, the handsome patrician, whose family boasted a great and noble descent, and whose fine manners made him one of the most popular amongst the youth of Rome? The simple Iope would listen—who could resist such entrancing music?—and the philosopher would have no objections to raise

against the suit, except that the suitor was a Sophist.

“And surely that is sufficient,” murmured Acatia, with a deep-drawn sigh. “It must not be, and to prevent it is in my power; for did not the messenger of the gods give me the shield?”

Thus, when the morning dawned, and Quintilia came and kissed her tenderly, and inquired how she did, she answered,

“So strangely well, that I shall go to the entertainments to-day.”

“Acatia!” exclaimed Quintilia incredulously.

“I am called thither,” replied Acatia quietly. “Do not remonstrate with me, O my sister.”

But Quintilia felt it her duty to do so, and she prophesied all kinds of evil for her sister as the result of such an adventure.

Acatia, however,—the usually submissive

Acatia,—was obstinate. She believed that her presence would benefit Iope, and therefore she determined to go. Long before the time for departure arrived, she insisted upon being prepared.

But the preparation was too great a strain upon her strength. Exhaustion was followed by insensibility ; and when she recovered her senses she was unable to rise from her couch.

“The gods forbid thee to carry out thy intention, sweet sister,” whispered Quintilia softly. “They themselves will watch over Iope.”

“For to-day,” answered Acatia. “To-morrow I shall be better.”

“To-morrow is the third and last day of the games,” said Quintilia.

“And therefore I must visit the circus or the theatre,” rejoined Acatia in positive tones.

Quintilia was silent. It seemed useless to bandy words with her sister on such a subject. She lifted her distaff, and communed with herself over her work. She rolled the shapeless wool into its first balls, until her reverie was broken by the entrance of Laberius.

The young priest had taken the first opportunity of visiting his sisters. Paulinus the physician had hurriedly announced their arrival as he passed him in the street, and the astonished Laberius was anxious to inquire the cause of the journey, and judge for himself how Acatia had borne the fatigue.

“O beloved!” said he, as he bent over his prostrate sister, “it was surely not wise to leave the quiet Laurentum.”

“I obeyed the gods,” murmured Acatia, “and they will watch over me.”

Laberius shrugged his shoulders. The

young priest of Jupiter had ceased to believe in the gods.

"She would go to the entertainments," remarked Quintilia, without raising her eyes from her employment; "but enraged Hygeia will not permit the gratification of her wishes."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the young priest. "Can your opinion about the exhibitions in the circus have undergone a change, O my sister?"

Acatia smiled. "There are many motives besides that of seeing which would induce me to attend a scene I did not approve," she answered; "I would observe the conduct of Iope."

"She is under the care of Valaria."

"And Valaria would encourage those things which we would discourage," said Quintilia. "She finds only that which is good for her charge in the suit of Aulus Camillus."

Laberius started. "Of what do you speak?" he inquired.

"Have you not heard of the tablets which Iope received after her appearance in the procession?" asked Acatia, regarding her brother with surprise.

"Tablets?" echoed the young priest.
"Who gave them to her?"

"They were sent by the hand of a shrouded female," answered Quintilia.

"Gods of Rome!" exclaimed Laberius.
"They must be the tablets which Lela the dancer was to deliver, and I allowed her to carry them. What have I done that I should be the means of Aulus Camillus wooing my cousin? If I, as a follower of Bromius, am unworthy my manhood, he also is unworthy. It must not be, sweet sisters. Iope must not be united to one of the company which I have deserted. It must not be," he repeated vehemently.

"Brother, you will help us to prevent it?" said Acatia.

"I swear I will!" replied Laberius, lifting up his hand, as was the custom when making a vow. "I dare not even imagine the innocent Iope introduced into the wild scenes which I have witnessed."

"Camillus is young and wealthy and noble. It will be difficult to raise objections to such a suit," said Quintillia.

"Plotinus has but to say a word," answered Laberius.

"And he will not," sighed Quintilia. "Paulinus has visited him, and he leaves the matter to the decision of destiny."

"We must propitiate destiny," said Laberius sarcastically.

"We must trust in the gods," said Quintilia, in solemn accents.

Then they talked of Acatia's dream, and the sick maiden asked her brother if he

would have time to attend them to the circus on the morrow.

“Is the fatigue necessary?” asked Labe-rius, bending tenderly over the beautiful, prostrate Acatia. “I will watch over Iope. Trust me, sister.”

“I trust thee,” said Acatia, after a pause ; and Quintilia breathed a thanksgiving, for she felt that a burden had been lifted from the mind of her sister.

But on the morrow, when Quintilia entered the chamber where Acatia slept, she was astonished to see her sister standing in the middle of the apartment fully attired. Her strength seemed to be miraculously renewed, and the exertion caused by her toilet had painted her pale cheeks with a colour which resembled that of health.

Quintilia set down the cup of milk and honey which she carried, with an exclama-tion of surprise and alarm.

Acatia greeted her with a smile. "Beloved," said she, "I have changed my mind; I cannot leave Laberius to carry out the command which has been given unto me."

"Alas!" exclaimed Quintilia, embracing her sister. "Do not say that, O my dearest; you cannot go."

"I must," answered Acatia, with a strange earnestness. "I had another dream last night, and it was so vivid that the phantoms in it appeared to possess a veritable substance. The messenger appeared to me again, O Quintilia, and bade me hasten to do that which I would do. And thou knowest what that is. We must follow Iope; she goes to the Theatre of Pompey, and therefore thither we must proceed. I know not what danger is to be apprehended, nor how my presence can avert the evil, but I walk in faith; and behold," she added gaily, "how I am girt up for the encounter. A new body has

surely been given unto me. For moons, nay, for years, I have been strange to such a feeling of health."

"It is but a momentary brilliance of the weak flame," cried Quintilia desperately. "Acatia, my beloved, do not be rash. Remain at home, and I will perform your mission."

"No," replied Acatia firmly. "The gods have clearly appointed me for their messenger, and though I fall by the way, I go."

Quintilia made no answer. There were moments when it was useless to reason with Acatia, and she knew that one of them had come. Nevertheless she hoped, and even prayed, that some obstacle might arise to prevent the adventure, and she narrowly watched the face and manner of her sister for some signs of its relinquishment.

But as the time drew near, Acatia's strength seemed rather to increase, and she

became eager for departure. Quintilia, however, would not hear of this until she had appealed to Paulinus. The invalid was therefore compelled to await the physician's return from a visit.

"Good, good!" he cried, when he saw the sisters wrapped in their pallas. "The gods make the air beneficial to thee, O my children."

"We must have a lectica and a guard," said Acatia, smiling, "We go to the games."

"A libation to Roma!" exclaimed the jovial physician. "I thought your curiosity would overcome your prejudices in the end, O astute maidens. But," he added more seriously, "you must take rest and refreshment on the road, little one, else I must forbid the adventure. Pause at the house of Fabian. It is true the old man is an atheist, and a leader of atheists, but what is that in

these days of free-thinking? Hath it not been said that the Emperor himself favours the Nazarenes? Fabian hath an excellent reputation and a kindly disposition, and will treat thee like a daughter. Quintilia, step aside with me while I write thee a line of introduction."

Acatia remonstrated, but the physician would have his way. She was left waiting in the atrium while Quintilia accompanied Paulinus to find his tablets.

"She must not go further than the house of Fabian," reiterated Paulinus, as he set his stylus to the wax. "The excitement of the crowded theatre would hasten the fall of the sword which hangs over her young head."

END OF VOL. I.





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